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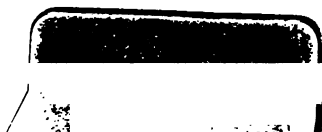
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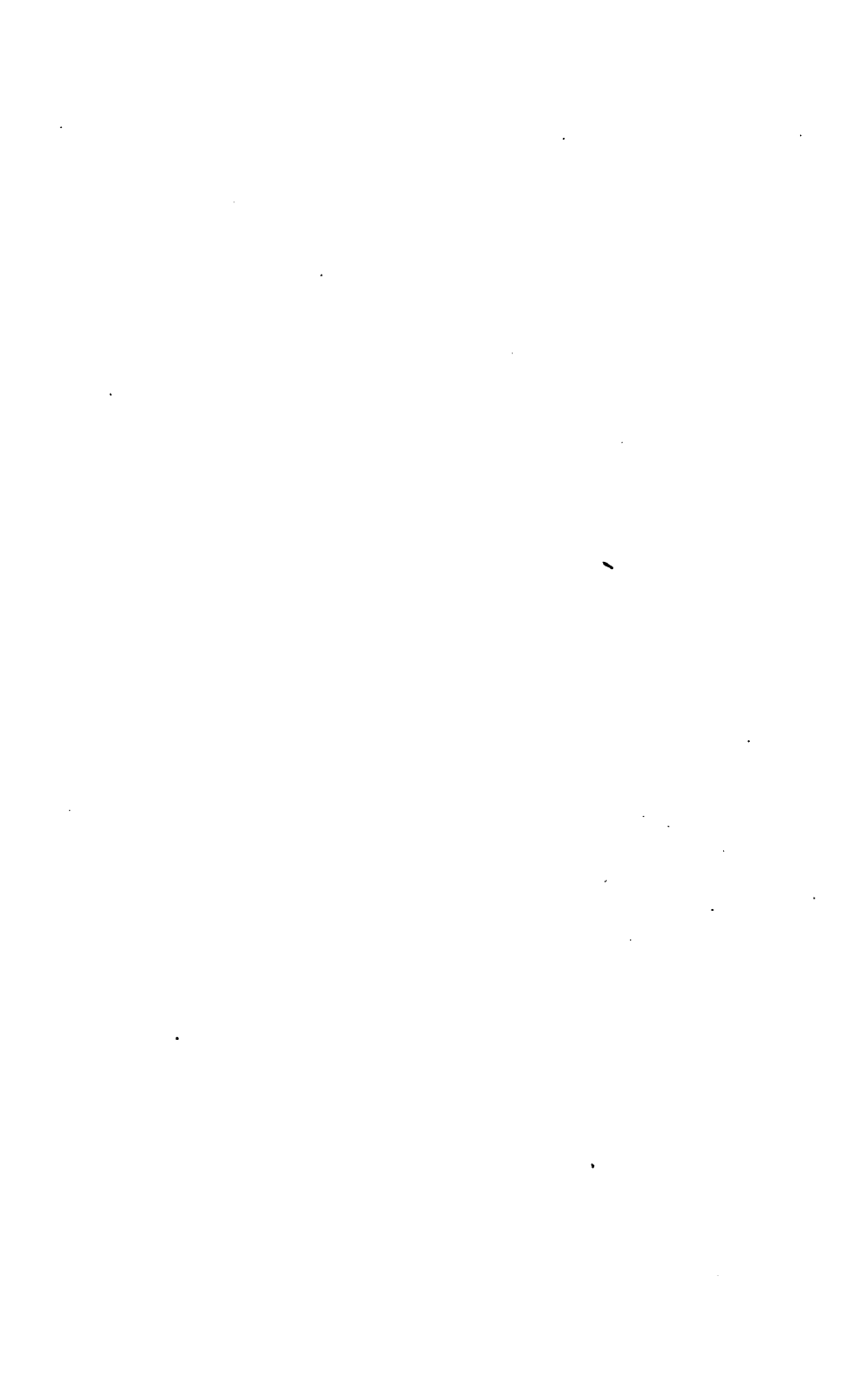


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THE FORLORN HOPE.



THE FORLORN HOPE.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "RUNNING THE GAUNTLET," "KISSING THE ROD," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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1867.

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TO

CHARLES FECHTER.



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THE FORLORN HOPE.



CHAPTER I.

"SOUND AN ALARM."

THE half-hour dressing-bell rung out as Sir Duncan Forbes jumped from the hired carriage which had borne him the last stage of his journey to Kilsyth, and immediately followed his servant, who had put in a pantomimically abrupt appearance at the carriage-door, to his room. The steaming horses shook their sides, and rattled their harness dismally, in the dreary autumnal evening ; but a host of gillies and understrappers had hurried out at the noise of the approaching wheels, and so quickly despoiled the carriage of its luggage, that within a very few minutes its

driver—comforted by something over his fare, in addition to a stiff glass of the incomparable Kilsyth whisky—was slowly wending his way back, over a road which to any one but a Highlander would have seemed impassable in the fog that had begun to cloud the neighbouring mountains in an almost impenetrable shroud of misty gray. From the cold, chilly, damp mountain air, from the long solitary ride, for the last twenty miles of which he had not met a human creature, to the airy bedroom with its French paper, the bright wood-fire burning on its hearth, the wax candles on the dressing-table, the drawn chintz curtains, the neat writing-table, the little shelf of prettily-bound well-chosen books, was a transition indeed for Duncan Forbes. One glance around sufficed to show him all these things, and to show him in addition the steaming bath, the warmed linen, the other various arrangements for his comfort which the forethought of Dixon his servant had prepared for him. He was used to luxuries, and thoroughly accustomed to rough it; he was not an impressionable young man; but

there are times, even if we be only eight-and-twenty, good-looking, and in the Household Brigade, when we feel a kind of sympathy with the working-man who declared that "life was not all beer and skittles," and are disposed to look rather more seriously than usual upon our own condition and our surroundings. The journey from Glenlaggan—it is, it must be confessed, an awful road—had had its effect on Duncan Forbes. Why he should have permitted himself to be worked upon either by a sense of solitude, or by an involuntary tribute to the wildness of the scenery, or perhaps by dyspepsia, arising from a recent change of living, to fall temporarily into a low state of mind; to think about his duns, debts, and difficulties; to wonder why he was not at that moment staying with his mother in Norfolk, instead of plunging into the depths of the Highlands; to think of his cousin Ethel Spalding, and to clench his fists violently and mutter strong expressions as the image of a certain Dundas Adair, commonly called Lord Adair, rose before him simultaneously with that of his said cousin; why he then fell into

a state which was half lachrymose and half morose, impelling him to refresh himself from a silver flask, and to make many mental resolutions as to his future life,—why he did all this is utterly immaterial to us, as Sir Duncan Forbes is by no manner of means our hero, in fact has very little to do with our story. But the journey had its effect upon him, and rendered the comfort and luxury of Kilsyth doubly precious in his eyes. So that when he had had his bath, and, well advanced in his dressing, was luxuriating in the comfort of cleanliness and fresh linen, and the prospect of an excellent dinner, he had sufficiently returned to his normal condition to ask Dixon—who had preceded him by a couple of days—whether the house was full, and who were there.

“House quite full, sir,” replied Dixon. “Colonel Jefferson, sir, of the First Life-guards; Captaining Severn, sir, of the Second Life-guards, and his lady; Markis Towcester, as have jist joined the Blues; Honble Captaining Shaddock, of the Eighteenth 'Ussars; Lord Roderick Douglas, of the Scots Fusiliers; and—”

“Drop the Army List, Dixon,” growled his master, at that moment performing heavily on his head with a pair of hair-brushes; “who else is here?”

“There’s the Danish Minister, sir—which I won’t try to pronounce his name—and his lady and there’s the Dook and Duchess of Northallerton—which the Dook has the gout that bad, his man told me—used to be in our ridgment, Sir Duncan, and was bought out by his mother on his father’s death—as to be past bearin’ sometimes; and Lady Fairfax, sir; and Lady Dunkeld, as is Lady Muriel’s cousin, sir; and a Mr. Pitcairn, as is a distant relation of the family’s; and a Mr. Fletcher, as is, I’m told, a hartist, or something of that kind, sir—he hasn’t brought a man here, sir; so I’m unable to say; but he seems to be well thought of, sir; quite at his ease, as they say, among the company, sir.”

“Dear me!” said Duncan Forbes, suspending the action of the hair-brushes for a moment, while he grinned grimly; “you seem to be a great observer, Dixon.”

“Well, sir, one can’t keep one’s hears shut entirely, nor one’s eyes, and I noticed this gentleman took a kind of leading part in the talk at dinner, sir, yesterday. O, I forgot, sir; Miss Kilsyth have not been well for the last two or three days, sir; kep’ her room, havin’ caught cold returnin’ from a luncheon-party up at what they call a shealing—kind of ’ut, sir, in the ’ills, where they put up when stalkin’, as I make out, sir,—and her maid says is uncommon low and bad.”

“Ill, is she?—Miss Kilsyth? Jove, that’s bad! Haven’t they sent for a doctor, or that kind of thing?”

“Yes, sir, they have sent for a doctor; and he’s been, sir; leastways when I say doctor, sir, I mean to say the ’pothecary from the village, sir. Comes on a shady kind of a cob, sir, and I shouldn’t say knew much about it. Beg your pardon, sir—dinner gong!”

Sir Duncan Forbes’ toilette is happily complete at the time of this announcement, and he sallies downstairs towards the drawing-room. Entering, he finds most of the company already as-

sembled; and in the careless glance which he throws around as the door closes behind him, he recognises a bevy of London friends, looking, with perhaps the addition of a little bronze in the men, and a little plumpness in the ladies, exactly as he left them at the concluding ball of the season, two months ago. Some he has not seen for a longer period, his host among them. Kilsyth of Kilsyth, keen sportsman, whether with rod or gun; landlord exercising influence over his tenants, not by his position alone, but by the real indubitable interest which he takes in their well-being; lord-lieutenant of his county, first patron and best judge at its agricultural meetings, chairman of the bench of magistrates, prime mover in the herring fishery, — what does Kilsyth of Kilsyth do in London? Little enough, truth to tell; gives a very perfunctory attendance at the House of Commons, meets old friends at Brookes's, dines at a few of the earlier meetings of the Fox Club, and does his utmost to keep out of the way of the Liberal whip, who dare not offend him, and yet grieves most lamentably over his shortcomings at St. Ste-

phen's. See him now as he stands on the hearth-rug, with his back to the drawing-room fire, a hale hearty man, whose fifty years of life have never bent his form nor scarcely dimmed the fire in his bright blue eye. Life, indeed, has been pretty smooth and pleasant to Kilsyth since, when a younger son, he was gazetted to the 42d; and after a slight sojourn in that distinguished regiment, was sent for by his father to take the place of his elder brother, killed by the bursting of a gun when out on a stalk. A shadow—deep enough at the moment, but now mercifully lightened by Time, the grim yet kindly consoler—had fallen across his path when his wife, whom he loved so well, and whom he had taken from her quiet English home, where, a simple parson's daughter, she had captivated the young Highland officer, had died in giving birth to a second child. But he had survived the shock; and long afterwards, when he had succeeded to the family title and estates, and was, indeed, himself well on the way to middle age, had married again. Kilsyth's second wife was the sister of a Scottish earl of old family and small

estate, a high-bred woman, much younger than her husband, who had borne him two children (little children at the time our story opens), and who, not merely in her Highland neighbourhood, but in the best society of London, in which she was ungrudgingly received, was looked upon as a pattern wife. With the name of Lady Muriel Kilsyth the most inveterate scandalmongers had never ventured to make free. The mere fact of her being more than twenty years younger than her husband had given them the greatest hope of onslaught when the marriage was first announced ; but Lady Muriel had calmly faced her foes, and not the most observant of them had as yet espied the smallest flaw in her harness. Her behaviour to her husband, without being in the least degree gushing, was so thoroughly circumspect, they lived together on such excellent terms of something that was evidently more than amity, though it never pretended to devotion, that the scandalmongers were utterly defeated. Balked in one direction, they launched out in another ; they could not degrade the husband by their pity, but they could mildly

annoy the wife with reflections on her conduct to her step-children. "Poor little things," they said, "with such an ambitious woman for step-mother, and children of her own to think of! Ronald may struggle on ; but as for poor Madeleine—" and uplifted eyebrows and shrugged shoulders completed the sentence. It is needless to say that Kilsyth himself heard none of these idle babblings, or that if he had, he would have treated them with scorn. "My lady" was to him the incarnation of every thing that was right and proper, that was clever and far-seeing ; he trusted her implicitly in every matter ; he looked up to and respected her ; he suffered himself to be ruled by her, and she ruled him very gently and with the greatest talent and tact in every matter of his life save one. Lady Muriel was all-powerful with her husband, except when, as he thought, her views were in the least harsh or despotic towards his daughter Madeleine ; and then he quietly but calmly held his own way. Madeleine was his idol, and no one, not even his wife, could shake him in his adoration of her. As he stands on the hearth-rug,

there is a shadow on his bright cheery face, for he has had bad news of his darling since he came in from shooting,—has been forbidden to go to her room lest he should disturb her; and at each opening of the door he looks anxiously in that direction, half wishing, half fearing Lady Muriel's advent with the doctor's latest verdict on the invalid.

The thin slight wiry man talking to Kilsyth, and rattling on garrulously in spite of his friend's obvious preoccupation, is Captain Severn, perhaps the best steeple-chase rider in England, and untouchable at billiards by any amateur. He is a slangy, turfy, raffish person, hating ladies' society, and using a singular vocabulary full of *Bell's-Life* idioms. He is, however, well connected, and has a charming wife, for whose sake he is tolerated; a lovely little fairy of a woman, whose heart is as big as her body; the merriest, most cheerful, best-tempered creature, trolling out her little French *chansons* in a clear bird-like voice; acting in charades with infinite character and piquancy; and withal the idol of the poor in the neighbourhood of their hunting-box in Leices-

tershire ; and the quickest, softest, and most attentive nurse in sickness, as a dozen of her friends could testify.

That bald head which you can just see over the top of the *Morning Post* belongs to the Duke of Northallerton, who has been all his life more or less engaged in politics ; who has, when his party has been in office, held respectively the important positions of Postmaster-General and Privy Seal ; and who was never so well described as by one of his private secretaries, who declared tersely that his grace was a “ kind old pump.” Outwardly he is a tall man of about fifty-five, with a high forehead, which has stood his friend through life, and obtained him credit for gifts which he never possessed, a boiled-gooseberry eye, a straight nose, and projecting buck-teeth. As becomes an old English gentleman, he wears a very high white cravat and a large white waistcoat ; indeed it is only within the last few years that he has relinquished his blue coat and gold buttons, and very tight pantaloons. He is reading the paper airily through his double glasses, and uttering an occa-

sional "Ha!" and "Dear me!" as he wades through the movements of the travelling aristocracy; but from time to time he removes the glasses from his nose, and looks up with a half-peevisish glance at his neighbour, Colonel Jefferson. Charley Jefferson (no one ever called him any thing else) has a large photograph album before him, at which he is not looking in the least; on the contrary, his glance is directed straight in front of him; and as he stands six feet four, his eyes, when he is sitting, would be about on a level with a short man's head; and he is tugging at his great sweeping grizzled moustache, and fidgeting with his leg, and muttering between his clinched teeth at intervals short phrases, which sound like "Little brute! break his neck! beastly little cad!" and such-like.

The individual thus objurgated by the Colonel is highly thought of by Sir Bernard Burke, and known to Debrett as John Ulick Delatrive, Marquis of Towcester, eldest son of the Duke of Plymouth, who has just been gazetted to the Blues, after some years at Eton and eighteen months' wandering on the Continent. Though he is barely twenty,

a more depraved young person is rarely to be found; his tutor, the Rev. Merton Sandford, who devoted the last few years of his life to him, and who has retired to his well-earned preferment of the largest living in the duke's gift, lifts up his eyes and shakes his head when, over a quiet bottle of claret with an old college friend, he speaks of Lord Towcester. The boy's reputation had preceded him to London; a story from the Viennese Embassy, of which he was the hero, came across in a private note to Blatherwick of the F. O., enclosed in the official white sheep-skin despatch-bag, and before night was discussed in half the smoking-rooms in Pall-Mall. The youngsters laughed at the anecdote and envied its hero; but older men looked grave; and Charley Jefferson, standing in the middle of a knot of men on the steps of the Rag, said he was deuced glad that the lad wasn't coming into his regiment; for if that story were true, the service would be none the better for such an accession to it, as, if it were his business, he should take an early opportunity of pointing out; and the listeners, who knew that

Colonel Jefferson was the best soldier and the strictest martinet throughout the household cavalry, and who marked the expression of his face as he pulled his moustache and strode away after delivering his dictum, thought that perhaps it was better for Towcester that his lot was cast in a different corps. You would not have thought there was much harm in the boy, though, from his appearance. Look at him now, as he bends over Lady Fairfax, until his face almost touches her soft glossy hair. It is a round, boyish, ingenuous face, though the eyes are rather deeply set, and there is something cruel about the mouth which the thin downy moustache utterly fails to hide. As Lady Fairfax turns her large dark eyes on her interlocutor, and looks up at him, her brilliant white teeth flashing in an irrepressible smile, the Colonel's growls become more frequent, and he tugs at his moustache more savagely than ever. Why? If you know any thing about these people, you will remember that ten years ago, when Emily Fairfax was Emily Ponsonby, and lived with her old aunt, Lady Mary, in the dull rambling old

house at Kew, Charley Jefferson, a penniless cornet in what were then the 13th Light Dragoons, was quartered at Hounslow; danced, rode, and flirted with her; carried off a lock of her hair when the regiment was ordered to India; and far away up country, in utter ignorance of all that was happening in England, used to gaze at it and kiss it, long after Miss Ponsonby had married old Lord Fairfax, and had become the reigning belle of the London season. Old Lord Fairfax is dead now, and Charley Jefferson has come into his uncle's fortune; and there is no cause or impediment why these twain should not become one flesh, save that Emily is still coquettish, and Charley is horribly jealous; and so matters are still in the balance.

The little old gentleman in the palpable flaxen wig and gold spectacles, who is poring over that case of Flaxman's cameos in genuine admiration, is Count Bulow, the Danish Ambassador; and the little old lady whose face is so wrinkled as to suggest an idea of gratitude that she is a lady, and consequently is not compelled to shave, is his wife. They are charming old people, childless them-

selves, but the cause of constant matchmaking in others. More flirtations come to a successful issue in the embassy at Eaton-place than in any other house in town; and the old couple, who have for years worthily represented their sovereign, are sponsors to half the children in Belgravia. They are both art-lovers, and their house is crammed with good things—pictures from Munich and Düsseldorf, choice bits of Thorwaldsen, big elk-horns, and quaint old Scandinavian drinking-cups. Old Lady Potiphar, who has the worst reputation and the bitterest tongue in London, says you meet “odd people” at the Bulows’; said “odd people” being artists and authors, English and foreign. Mr. Fletcher, R.A., who is just now talking to the Countess, is one of the most favoured guests at the embassy, but he is not an “odd person,” even to Lady Potiphar, for he goes into what she calls “sassiety,” and has been “actially asked to Mar’bro’ House”—where Lady Potiphar is not invited. A quiet, unpretending, gentlemanly, middle-aged man, Mr. Fletcher; wearing his artistic honours with easy dignity, and by no means

oblivious of the early days when he gave drawing-lessons at per hour to many of the nobility who now call him their friend.

There are three or four young ladies present, who need no particular description, and who are dividing the homage of Captain Shaddock; while Lord Roderick Douglas, a young nobleman to whom Nature has been more bountiful in nose than in forehead, and Mr. Pitcairn, a fresh-coloured, freckled, blue-eyed gentleman, lithe and active as a greyhound, are muttering in a corner, making arrangements for the next day's shooting.

The entrance of Sir Duncan Forbes caused a slight commotion in the party; and every one had a look or a word of welcome for the new comer, for he was a general favourite. He moved easily from group to group, shaking hands and chatting pleasantly. Kilsyth, who was specially fond of him, grasped his hand warmly; the Duke laid aside the *Morning Post* in the midst of a most interesting leader, in which Mr. Bright was depicted as a pleasant compound of Catiline and

Judas Iscariot; Count Bulow gave up his cameos; and even grim Charley Jefferson relaxed in his feverish supervision of Lord Towcester.

As for the ladies, they unanimously voted Duncan charming, quite charming, and could not make too much of him.

"And where have you come from, Duncan?" asked Kilsyth, when the buzz consequent on his entrance had subsided.

"Last, from Burnside," said Duncan.

"Burnside!—where's Burnside?" asked Captain Severn shortly.

"Burnside is on the Tay, the prettiest house in all Scotland, if I may venture to say so, being at Kilsyth; of course it don't pretend to any thing of this kind. It's a mere doll's-house of a place, nothing but a shooting-box; but in its way it's a perfect paradise."

"Are you speaking by the card, Duncan?" said Count Bulow, with the slightest foreign accent; "or was there some Peri in this paradise that gave it such fascination in your eyes?"

"Peri! No indeed, Count," replied Duncan,

laughing; "Burnside is a bachelor establishment, —rigidly proper, quite monastic, and all that kind of thing. It belongs to old Sir Saville Rowe, who was a swell doctor in London — O, ages ago!"

"Sir Saville Rowe!" exclaimed the Duke; "I know him very well. He was physician to the late King, and was knighted just before his majesty's death. I haven't seen him for years, and thought he was dead."

"He's any thing but that, Duke. A remarkably healthy old man, and as jolly as possible; capital company still, though he's long over seventy. And his place is really lovely; the worst of it is, it's such a tremendous distance from here. I've been travelling all day; and as it is I thought I was late for dinner. The gong sounded as I left my room."

"You were late, Duncan; you always are," said Kilsyth, with a smile. "But the Duchess is keeping you in countenance to-night, and Lady Muriel has not shown yet. She is up with Madeleine, who is ill, poor child."

"Ah, so I was sorry to hear. What is it? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, please God, no. But she caught cold, and is a little feverish to-night: the doctor is with her now, and we shall soon have his report. Ah, here is the Duchess."

The Duchess of Northallerton, a tall portly woman, with a heavy ruminating expression of face, like a sedate cow, entered as he spoke, and advancing said a few gracious nothings to Duncan Forbes. She was closely followed by a servant, who, addressing his master, said that Lady Muriel would be engaged for a few minutes longer with the doctor, and had ordered dinner to be served.

The conversation at dinner, falling into its recent channel, was resumed by Lord Towcester, who said, "Who had you at this doctor's, Duncan? Queer sort of people, I suppose?"

"Some of his patients, perhaps," said Lady Fairfax, showing all her teeth.

"Black draught and that sort of thing to drink, and cold compresses on the sideboard," said

Captain Severn, who was nothing if not objectionable.

"I never had better living, and never met pleasanter people," said Duncan Forbes pointedly. "They wouldn't have suited you, perhaps, Severn, for they all talked sense; and none of them knew the odds on any thing—though that might have suited you perhaps, as you'd have been able to win their money."

"Any of Sir Saville's profession?" cut in the Duke, diplomatically anxious to soften matters.

"Only one—a Dr. Wilmot; the great man of the day, as I understand."

"O, every body has heard of Wilmot," said half-a-dozen voices.

"He's the great authority on fever, and that kind of thing," said Jefferson. "Saved Broadwater's boy in typhus last year when all the rest of them had given him up."

"Dr. Wilmot remains there," said Duncan; "our party broke up yesterday, but Wilmot stays on. He and I had a tremendous chat last night, and I never met a more delightful fellow."

At this moment Lady Muriel entered the room, and as she passed her husband's chair laid a small slip of paper on the table by his plate; then went up to Duncan Forbes, who had risen to receive her, and gave him a hearty welcome. Kilsyth took an opportunity of opening the paper, and the healthy colour left his cheeks as he read :

"M. is much worse to-night. Dr. Joyce now pronounces it undoubted scarlet-fever."

The old man rose from the table, asking permission to absent himself for a few moments; and as he moved, whispered to Duncan, who was sitting at his right-hand, "You said Dr. Wilmot was still at Burnside?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he hurried into the hall, wrote a few hasty lines, and gave them to the butler, saying, "Tell Donald to ride off at once to Acray, and telegraph this message. Tell him to gallop all the way."

CHAPTER II.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

DUNCAN FORBES was given to exaggeration, as is the fashion of the day ; but he had scarcely exaggerated the beauty of Burnside, even in the rapturous terms which he chose to employ in speaking of it. It was, indeed, a most lovely spot, standing on the summit of a high hill, wooded from base to crest, and with the silver Tay—now rushing over a hard pebbly bed, now softly flowing in a scarcely fathomable depth of still water through a deep ravine with towering rocks on either side—bubbling at its feet. From the higher windows—notably from the turret ; and it was a queer rambling turreted house, without any preponderating style of architecture, but embracing, and that not unpicturesquely, a great many—you looked down upon the pretty little

town of Dunkeld, with its broad bridge spanning the flood, and the gray old tower of its cathedral rearing itself aloft like a hoary giant athwart the horizon, and the trim lawn of the ducal residence in the distance—an oasis of culture in a desert of wildness, yet harmonising sufficiently with its surroundings. Sloping down the steep bank on which the house was placed, and overhanging the brawling river beneath, ran a broad gravel path, winding between the trees, which at certain points had been cut away to give the best views of the neighbouring scenery; and on this path, at an early hour on the morning succeeding the night on which Duncan Forbes had arrived at Kilsyth, two men were walking, engaged in earnest conversation. An old man one of them, but in the enjoyment of a vigorous old age: his back is bowed, and he uses a stick; but if you remark, he does not use it as a crutch, lifting it now and again to point his remark, or striking it on the ground to emphasize his decision. A tall old man, with long white hair flowing away from under the brim of his wideawake hat, with bright blue

eyes and well-cut features, and a high forehead and white hands, with long lithe clever-looking fingers. Those eyes and fingers have done their work in their day, professionally and socially. Those eyes have looked into the eyes of youth and loveliness, and have read in them that in a few months their light would be quenched for ever; those fingers have clasped the beating pulses of seemingly full and vigorous manhood, and have recognised that the axe was laid at the root of the apparently tall and flourishing tree, and that in a little time it would topple headlong down. Those eyes "looked love to eyes that spake again;" those hands clasped hands that returned their clasp, and that trembled fondly and confidingly within them; that voice, professionally modulated to babble of sympathy, compassion, and hope, trembled with passion and whispered all its human aspirations into the trellised ear of beauty, once and once only. Looking at the old gentleman, so mild and gentle and benevolent, with his shirt-front sprinkled with snuff, and his old-fashioned black gaiters and his gouty shoes, you

could hardly imagine that he was the hero of a scandal which five-and-thirty years before had rung through society, and given the *Satirist*, and other scurrilous publications of the time, matter for weeks and weeks of filthy comment. And yet it was so. Sir Saville Rowe (then Dr. Rowe), physician to one of the principal London hospitals, and even then a man of mark in his profession, was called in to attend a young lady who represented herself as a widow, and with whom, after a time, he fell desperately in love. For months he attended her through a trying illness, from which, under his care, she recovered. Then, when her recovery was complete, he confessed his passion, and they were engaged to be married. One night, within a very short time of the intended wedding, he called at her lodgings and found a man there, a coarse slangy blackguard, who, after a few words, abruptly proclaimed himself to be the lady's husband, and demanded compensation for his outraged honour. Words ensued; and more than words: the man—half-drunk, all bully—struck the doctor; and Rowe, who was a power-

ful man, and who was mad with rage at what he imagined was a conspiracy, returned the blows with interest. The police were summoned, and Rowe was hauled off to the station-house ; but on the following day the prosecutor was not forthcoming, and the doctor was liberated. The scandal spread, and ruffians batted on it, as they ever will ; but Dr. Rowe's courage and professional skill enabled him to live it down ; and when, two years after, in going round a hospital-ward with his pupils, he came upon his old love at the verge of death, his heart, which he thought had been sufficiently steeled, gave way within him, and once more he set himself to the task of curing her. He did all that could be done ; had her removed to a quiet suburban cottage, tended by the most experienced nurses, never grudged one moment of his time to visit her constantly ; but it was too late : hard living and brutal treatment had done their work ; and Dr. Rowe's only love died in his arms, imploring Heaven's blessings on him. That wound in his life, deep as it was, has long since cicatrised and healed over,

leaving a scar which was noticeable to very few long before he attained to the first rank in his profession and received the titular reward of his services to royalty. He has for some time retired from active practice, though he will still meet in consultation some old pupil or former colleague; but he takes life easily now, passing the season in London, the autumn in Scotland, and the winter at Torquay; in all of which places he finds old friends chatable and kindly, who help him to while away the pleasant autumn of his life.

The other man is about eight-and-thirty, with keen bright brown eyes, a broad brow, straight nose, thin lips, and heavy jaw, indicative of firmness, not to say obstinacy; a tall man with stooping shoulders, and a look of quiet placid attention in his face; with a slim figure, a jerky walk, and a habit of clasping his hands behind his back, and leaning forward as though listening; a man likely to invite notice at first sight from his unmistakable earnestness and intellect, otherwise a quiet gentlemanly man, whose profession it was impossible to assign, yet who was obviously a man of

mark in his way. This was Chudleigh Wilmot, who was looked upon by those who ought to know as *the* coming man in the London medical profession; whose lectures were to be attended before those of any other professor at St. Vitus's Hospital; whose contributions on fever cases to the *Scalpel* had given the *Times* subject-matter for a leader, in which he had been most honourably mentioned; and who was commencing to reap the harvest of honour and profit which accrues to the fortunate few. He is an old pupil of Sir Saville Rowe's, and there is no one in whose company the old gentleman has greater delight.

"Smoke, Chudleigh, smoke! Light up at once. I know you're dying to have your cigar, and daren't out of deference to me. Fancy I'm your master still, don't you?"

"Not a bit of it, old friend. I've given up after-breakfast smoking as a rule, because, you see, that delightful bell in Charles-street begins to ring about a quarter to ten, and—"

"So much the better. Let them ring. They were knockers in my day, and I recollect how

delighted I used to be at every rap. But there's no one to ring or knock here; and so you may take your cigar quietly. I've been longing for this time; longing to have what the people about here call a 'crack' with you—impossible while those other men were here; but now I've got you all to myself."

"Yes," said Wilmot, who by this time had lighted his cigar—"yes, and you'll have me all to yourself for the next four days; that is to say, if you will."

"If I will! Is there any thing in the world could give me greater pleasure? I get young again, talking to you, Chudleigh. I mind me of the time when you used to come to lecture, a great raw boy, with, I should say, the dirtiest hands and the biggest note-book in the whole hospital." And the old gentleman chuckled at his reminiscence.

"Well, I've managed to wash the first, and to profit by the manner in which I filled the second from your lectures," said Wilmot, not without a blush.

“Not a bit, not a bit,” interposed Sir Saville ;
“you would have done well enough without any lectures of mine, though I’m glad to think that in that celebrated question of anæsthetics you stuck by me, and enabled me triumphantly to defeat Macpherson of Edinburgh. That was a great triumph for us, that was ! Dear me, when I think of the charlatans ! Eh, well, never mind ; I’m out of all that now. So, you have a few days more, you were saying, and you’re going to give them up to me.”

“Nothing will please me so much. Because, you see, I shall make it a combination of pleasure and business. There are several things on which I want to consult you,—points which I have reserved from time to time, and on which I can get no such opinion as yours. I’m not due in town until the 3d of next month. Whittaker, who has taken my practice, doesn’t leave until the 5th, which is a Sunday, and even then only goes as far as Guildford, to a place he’s taken for some pheasant-shooting ; a nice, close, handy place, where Mrs. Whittaker can accompany him. She

thinks he's so fascinating, that she does not like to let him out of her sight."

"Whittaker! Whittaker!" said Sir Saville; "is it a bald man with a cock-eye?—used to be at Bartholomew's."

"That's the man! He's in first-rate practice now, and deservedly, for he's thoroughly clever and reliable; but his beauty has not improved by time. However, Mrs. Whittaker doesn't see that; and it's with the greatest difficulty he ever gets permission to attend a lady's case."

"You must be thankful Mrs. Wilmot isn't like that."

"O, I am indeed," replied Wilmot shortly.

"By the way, I've never had an opportunity of talking to you about your marriage, and about your wife, Chudleigh. I got your wedding-cards, of course; but that's—ah, that must be three years ago."

"Four."

"Four! Is it indeed so long? Tut, tut! how time flies! I've called at your house in London, but your wife has not been at home; and as I

don't entertain ladies, you see, of course I've missed an opportunity of cultivating her acquaintance."

"Ye-es. I've heard Mrs. Wilmot say that she had seen your cards, and that she was very sorry to have been out when you called," said Dr. Wilmot with, in him, a most unnatural hesitation.

"Yes, of course," said old Sir Saville, with a comical look out of the corners of his eyes, which fell unheeded on his companion. "Well, now, as I've never seen her, and as I'm not likely to see her now,—for I'm an old man, and I've given up ceremony visits at my time of life,—tell me about your wife, Chudleigh; you know the interest I take in you; and that, perhaps, may excuse my asking about her. Does she suit you? Are you happy with her?"

Wilmot looked hard for an instant at his friend with a sudden quick glance of suspicion, then relaxed his brows, and laughed outright.

"Certainly, my dear Sir Saville, you are the most original of men. Who on earth else would

have dreamt of asking a man such a home question? It's worse than the queries put in the proposal papers of insurance-offices. However, I'm glad to be able to give a satisfactory answer. I *am* happy with my wife, and she *does* suit me."

"Yes; but what I mean is, are you in love with her?"

"Am I what?"

"In love with her. I mean, are you always thinking of her when you are away from her? Are you always longing to get back to her? Does her face come between you and the book you are reading? When you are thinking-out an intricate case, and puzzling your brains as to how you shall deal with it, do you sometimes let the whole subject slip out of your mind, to ponder over the last words she said to you, the last look she gave you?"

"God bless your soul, my dear old friend! You might as well ask me if I didn't play leap-frog with the house-surgeon of St. Vitus's, or challenge any member of the College of Physicians to a single-wicket match. Those are the

delassements of youth, my dear sir, that you are talking about; of very much youth indeed."

"I know one who wasn't 'very much youth' when he carried out the doctrine religiously," said the old gentleman in reply.

"Ah, then perhaps the lady wasn't his wife," said Wilmot, without the smallest notion of the dangerous ground on which he was treading. "No, the fact is simply this: I am, as you know, a man absorbed in my profession. I have no leisure for nonsense of the kind you describe, nor for any other kind of nonsense. My wife recognises that perfectly; she does all the calling and visiting which society prescribes. I go to a few old friends' to dinner in the season, and sometimes show up for a few minutes at the house of a patient where Mrs. Wilmot thinks it necessary for me to be seen. We each fulfil our duties perfectly, and we are in the evening excellent friends."

"Ye-es," said Sir Saville doubtfully; "that's all delightful, and—"

"As to longing to get back to her, and face

coming between you and your book, and always thinking, and that kind of thing," pursued Wilmot, not heeding him, "I recollect, when I was a dresser at the hospital, long before I passed the College, I had all those feelings for a little cousin of mine who was then living at Knightsbridge with her father, who was a clerk in the Bank of England. But then he died, and she married—not the barber, but another clerk in the Bank of England, and I never thought any more about it. Believe me, my dear friend, except to such perpetual evergreens as yourself, those ideas die off at twenty years of age."

"Well, perhaps so, perhaps so," said the old gentleman; "and I daresay it's quite right, only—well, never mind. Well, Chudleigh, it's a pleasant thing for me, remembering you, as I said, a great hulking lad when you first came to lecture, to see you now carrying away every thing before you. I don't know that you're quite wise in giving Whittaker your practice, for he's a deep designing dog; and you can tell as well as I do how a word dropped deftly here and there may steal

away a patient before the doctor knows where he is, especially with old ladies and creatures of that sort. But, however, it's the slack time of year,—that's one thing to be said,—when every body that's any body is safe to be out of town. Ah, by the way, that reminds me! I was glad to see by the *Morning Post* that you had had some very good cases last season."

"The *Morning Post*!—some very good cases! What do you mean?"

"I mean, I saw your name as attending several of the nobility: 'His lordship's physician, Dr. Wilmot, of Charles Street,' et cetera; that kind of thing, you know."

"O, do you congratulate me on those? I certainly pulled young Lord Coniston, Lord Broadwater's son, through a stiff attack of typhus; but as I would have done the same for his lordship's porter's child, I don't see the value of the paragraph. By the way, I shouldn't wonder if I were indebted to the porter for the paragraph."

"Never mind, my dear Chudleigh, whence the paragraph comes, but be thankful you got it.

‘Sweet,’ as Shakespeare says,—‘sweet are the uses of advertisement;’ and our profession is almost the only one to which they are not open. The inferior members of it, to be sure, do a little in the way of the red lamp and the vaccination gratis; but when you arrive at any eminence you must not attempt any thing more glaring than galloping about town in your carriage, and getting your name announced in the best society.”

“The best society!” echoed Wilmot with an undisguised sneer. “My dear Sir Saville, you seem to have taken a craze for Youth, Beauty, and High Life, and to exalt them as gods for your idolatry.”

“For *my* idolatry! No, my boy, for yours. I don’t deny that when I was in the ring, I did my best to gain the approbation of all three, and that I succeeded I may say without vanity. But I’m out of it now, and I can only give counsel to my juniors. But that my counsel is good worldly wisdom, Chudleigh, you may take the word of an old man who has—well, who has, he flatters himself, made his mark in life.”

The old gentleman was so evidently sincere in this exposition of his philosophy, that Wilmot repressed the smile that was rising to his lips, and said:

“We can all of us only judge by our own feelings, old friend; and mine, I must own, don’t chime in with yours. As to Youth—well, I’m now old for my age, and I only look upon it as developing more available resources and more available material to work upon; as to Beauty, its influence died out with me when Maria Strutt married the clerk in the Bank of England; and as to High Life, I swear to you it would give me as much pleasure to save the life of one of your gillie’s daughters, as it would to be able to patch up an old marquis, or to pull the heir to a dukedom through his teething convulsions.”

The old man looked at his friend for a moment and smiled sardonically, then said:

“You’re young yet, Chudleigh; very young—much younger than your years of London life should permit you to be. However, that’s a malady that Time will cure you of. Saving lives

of gillie's daughters is all very well in the abstract, and no one can value more than I do the power which Providence, under Him, has given to us; but—Well, what is it?"

This last remark was addressed to a servant who was approaching them.

"A telegram, sir, for Dr. Wilmot," said the man, handing an envelope to Wilmot as he spoke; "just arrived from the station."

Wilmot tore open the envelope and read its enclosure—read it twice with frowning brow and sneering mouth; then handed it to his host, saying:

"A little too strong, that, eh? Is one never to be free from such intrusions? Do these people imagine that because I am a professional man I am to be always at their beck and call? Who is this Mr. Kilsyth, I wonder, who hails me as though I were a cabman on the rank?"

"Mr. Kilsyth, my dear fellow!" said Sir Saville, laughing; "I should like to see the face of any Highlander who heard you say that. Kilsyth of Kilsyth is the head of one of the oldest and most powerful clans in Aberdeenshire."

"I suppose he won't be powerful enough to have me shot, or speared, or 'hangit on a tree,' for putting his telegram into my pocket, and taking no further notice of it, for all that," said Wilmot.

"Do you mean to say that you intend to refuse his request, Chudleigh?"

"Most positively and decidedly, if request you call it. I confess it looks to me more like a command; and that's a style of thing I don't particularly affect, old friend."

"But do you see the facts? Miss Kilsyth is down with scarlet-fever—"

"Exactly. I'm very sorry, I'm sure, so far as one can be sorry for any one of whose existence one was a moment ago in ignorance; and I trust Miss Kilsyth will speedily recover; but it won't be through any aid of mine."

"My dear Chudleigh," said the old man gently, "you are all wrong about this. It's not a pleasant thing for me, as your host, to bid you go away; more especially as I had been looking forward with such pleasure to these few

days' quiet with you. But I know it is the right thing for you to do; and why you should refuse, I cannot conceive. You seem to have taken umbrage at the style of the message; but even if one could be polite in a telegram, a father whose pet daughter is dangerously ill seldom stops to pick his words."

"But suppose I hadn't been here?"

"My dear friend, I decline to suppose any thing of the sort. Suppose I had not been in the way when Sir Astley advised his late Majesty to call me in; I should still have been a successful man, it's true; but I should not have had the honour or the position I have, nor the wealth which enables me now to enjoy my ease, instead of slaving away still like—like some whom we know. No, no; drop your radicalism, I beseech you. You would go miles to attend to a sick gillie or a shepherd's orphan. Do the same for a very charming young girl, as I'm told,—Forbes knows her very well,—and for one of the best men in Scotland."

"Well, I suppose you're right, and I must go. It's an awful journey, isn't it?"

“Horses to the break, Donald; and tell George to get ready to drive Dr. Wilmot.—I’ll send you the first stage. Awful journey, you call it, through the loveliest scenery in the Highlands! I don’t know what causes the notion, but I have an impression that this will be a memorable day in your career, Chudleigh.”

“Have you, old friend?” said Wilmot, with a shoulder-shrug. “One doesn’t know how it may end, but, so far, it has been any thing but a pleasant one. Nor does a fifty-mile journey over hills inspire me with much pleasant anticipation. But, as you seem so determined about it being my duty, I’ll go.”

“Depend on it, I am giving you good advice, as some day you shall acknowledge to me.”

And within half-an-hour Chudleigh Wilmot had started for Kilsyth, on a journey which was to influence the whole of his future life.

CHAPTER III.

WATCHING AND WAITING.

THE news which she had learned from Doctor Joyce, and had in her brief pencil-note communicated to her husband, was horribly annoying to Lady Muriel Kilsyth. To have her party broken up—and there was no doubt that, as soon as the actual condition of affairs was known, many would at once take to flight—was bad enough; but to have an infectious disorder in the house, and to be necessarily compelled to keep up a semblance of sympathy with the patient labouring under that disorder, even if she were not required to visit and tend her, was to Lady Muriel specially galling; more specially galling as she happened not to possess the smallest affection for the individual in question, indeed to regard her rather with dislike than otherwise. When Lady Muriel

Inchgarvie married Kilsyth of Kilsyth,—the Inchgarvie estates being heavily involved, and her brother the Earl, who had recently succeeded to the title, strongly counselling the match,—she agreed to love, honour, and obey the doughty chieftain whom she espoused ; but she by no means undertook any responsibilities with regard to the two children by his former marriage. The elder of these, Ronald, was just leaving Eton when his step-mother appeared upon the scene ; and as he had since been at once gazetted to the Life-guards, and but rarely showed in his father's house, he had caused Lady Muriel very little anxiety. But it was a very different affair with Madeleine. She had the disadvantage of being perpetually *en évidence* ; of being very pretty ; of causing blundering new acquaintances to say, “Impossible, Lady Muriel, that this can be your daughter !” of riling her step-mother in every possible way—notably by her perfect high-breeding, her calm quiet ignorance of intended slights, her determinate persistence in keeping up the proper relations with her father, and her invariable politeness—nothing but

politeness—to her step-mother. One is necessarily cautious of using strong terms in these days of persistent repression of all emotions; but it is scarcely too much to say that Lady Muriel hated her step-daughter very cordially. They were too nearly of an age for the girl to look up to the matron, or for the matron to feel a maternal interest in the girl. They were too nearly of an age for the elder not to feel jealous of the younger—of her personal attractions, and of the influence which she undoubtedly exercised over her father.

Not that Lady Muriel either laid herself out for attraction, or was so devotedly attached to her husband as to desire the monopoly of his affection. By nature she was hard, cold, self-contained, and very proud. Portionless as she had been, and desirable as it was that she should marry a rich man, she had refused several offers from men more coeval with her than the husband she at last accepted, simply because they were made by men who were wealthy, and nothing else. Either birth or talent would, in conjunction with wealth, have won her; but Mr. Burton, the great

pale-ale brewer, and Sir Coke Only, the great railway carrier, proffered their suits in vain, and retired in the deepest confusion after Lady Muriel's very ladylike, but thoroughly unmistakable, rejection of their offers. She married Kilsyth because he was a man of ancient family, large income, warm heart, and good repute. At no period, either immediately before or after her marriage, had she professed herself to be what is called "in love" with the worthy Scottish gentleman. She respected, humoured, and ruled him. But not for one instant did she forget her duty, or give a chance for scandal-mongers to babble of her name over their five-o'clock tea. No woman married to a man considerably her senior need be at any loss for what, as Byron tells us, used to be called a *cicisbeo*, and was in his time called a *cortejo*, if she be the least attractive. And Lady Muriel Kilsyth was considerably more than that. She had a perfectly-formed, classical little head, round which her dark hair was always tightly bound, culminating in a thick knot behind, large deep liquid brown eyes, an impertinent *retroussé*

nose, a pretty mouth, an excellent complexion, and a ripe melting figure. You might have searched the drawing-rooms of London through and through without finding a woman better calculated to fascinate every body save the youngest boys, and there were many even of them who would gladly have boasted of a kind look or word from Lady Muriel. When her marriage was announced, they discussed it at the clubs, as they will discuss such things, the dear genial old prozers, the bibulous captains, the lip-smacking Bardolphs of St. James's-street; and they prophesied all kinds of unhappiness and woe to Kilsyth. But that topic of conversation had long since died out for want of fuel to feed it. Lady Muriel had visited London during the season; had gone every where; had been reported as perfectly adoring her two little children; and had no man's name invidiously coupled with hers. Peace reigned at Kilsyth, and the intimates of the house vied with each other in attention and courtesy to its new mistress; while the gossips of the outside world had never a word to say against her.

I don't say that Lady Muriel Kilsyth was thoroughly happy, any more than that Kilsyth himself was in that beatific state; because I simply don't believe that such a state of things is compatible with the ordinary conditions of human life. It is not because the old stories of our none of us being better than we should be, of our all having some skeleton in our cupboards, and some ulcerated sores beneath our flannel waistcoats, have been so much harped upon, that I am going to throw my little pebble on the great cairn, and add my testimony to the doctrine of *vanitas vanitatum*. It would be very strange indeed, if, as life is nowadays constituted, we had not our skeleton, and a time when we could confront him; when we could calmly untwist the button on the door and let him out, and pat his skull, and look at his articulated ribs, and notice how deftly his wire-hooked thigh-bones jointed on to the rest of his carcass; and see whether there were no means of ridding ourselves of him,—say by flinging him out of window, when the police would find him, or of stowing him away in the

dust-bin, when he would be noticed by the contractor; and of finally putting him back, and acknowledging ourselves compelled to suffer him even unto the end. I do not say that in the broad-shouldered, kind-hearted, jovial sportsman Lady Muriel had found exactly what she dreamed upon when, in the terraced garden at Inchgarvie, she used to read Walter Scott, and, looking over the flashing stream that wound through her father's domain, fancy herself the Lady of the Lake, and await the arrival of Fitzjames. I do not say that Kilsyth himself might not, in the few moments of his daily life which he ever spared to reflection, and which were generally when he was shaving himself in the morning,—I do not say that Kilsyth himself might not have occasionally thought that his elegant and stately wife might have been a little kinder to Madeleine, a little more recognisant of the girl's charms, a little more thoughtful of her wants, and a little more tender towards her girlish vagaries. But neither of them, however they may have thought the other suspected them, ever spoke of their secret thoughts; and

to the outer world there was no more well-assorted couple than the Kilsyths.

It was a great thing for the comfort of the entire party that Lady Muriel was a woman of nerve, and that Kilsyth took his cue from her, backed up by the fact that it was his darling Madeleine who was ill, and that any inconvenience that might accrue to any of the party in consequence of her illness would be set down to her account. Lady Muriel gave a good general answer, delivered with a glance round the table, and was inclusive of every body, so as to prevent any further questioning. Dr. Joyce had said that Madeleine was not so well that night; but that was to be expected; her cold was very bad, she was slightly feverish: any one—and Lady Muriel turned deftly to the Duchess of Northallerton—who knew any thing, would have expected that, would they not? The Duchess, who knew nothing, but who didn't like to say so, declared that of course they would; and then Lady Muriel, feeling it necessary *that* conversation should be balked, turned to Sir Duncan Forbes, and began

to ask him questions as to his doings since the end of the season. Forbes replied briskly,—there was no better man in London to follow a lead, whether in talk or at cards,—and so turned the talk that most of those present were immediately interested. The names which Duncan Forbes mentioned were known to all present; all were interested in their movements; all had something to say about them; so that the conversation speedily became general, and so remained until the ladies quitted the table. When they had retired, Kilsyth ordered in the tumblers; and it was nearly eleven o'clock before the gentlemen appeared in the drawing-room. Then Lady Fairfax, with one single wave of her fan, beckoned Charley Jefferson into an empty seat on the ottoman by her side,—a seat which little Lord Towcester, immediately on entering the door, had surveyed with vinous eyes,—and, while one of the anonymous young ladies was playing endless variations on the “*Harmonious Blacksmith*,” commenced and continued a most vivid one-sided conversation, to all of which the infatuated Colonel

only replied by shrugs of his shoulders, and tugs at his heavy moustache. Then the Duchess pursued the Duke into a corner ; and rescuing from him the *Morning Post*, which his grace had pounced upon on entering the room with the hope of further identifying Mr. Bright with Judas Iscariot, began addressing him in a low monotone, like the moaning of the sea ; now rising into a little hum, now falling into a long sweeping hiss, but in each variety evidently confounding the Duke, who pulled at his cravat and rubbed his right ear in the height of nervous dubiety. In the behaviour of the other guests there was nothing pronounced, save occasional and unwonted restlessness. The Danish Minister and his wife played their usual game at backgammon ; and the customary talk, music, and flirtation were carried on by the remainder of the company ; but Lady Muriel knew that some suspicion of the actual truth had leaked out, and determined on her plan of action.

So that night, when the men had gone to the smoking-room, and the ladies were some of them

talking in each other's bedrooms, and others digesting and thinking over, as is the feminine manner, under the influence of hair-brush, the events of the day; when Kilsyth had made a tip-toe visit to his darling's chamber, and had shaken his head sadly over a whispered statement from her little German maid that she was "*bien malade*," and had returned to his room and dismissed his man, and was kicking nervously at the logs on the hearth, and mixing his tumbler preparatory to taking his narcotic instalment of *Blackwood*,—he heard a tap at his door, and Lady Muriel, in a most becoming dressing-gown of rose-coloured flannel, entered the room. The tumbler was put down, the *Blackwood* was thrown aside, and in a minute Kilsyth had wheeled an easy-chair round to the hearth, and handed his wife to it.

"You're tired, Alick, I know, and I wouldn't have disturbed you now had there not been sufficient reason—"

"Madeleine's not worse, Muriel? I was there this minute, and Gretchen said that—"

"O no, she's no worse! I was in her room

too just now,—though I think it is a little absurd my going,—and there does not seem to be much change in her since I saw her, just before dinner. She is asleep just now.”

“Thank God for that!” said Kilsyth heartily. “After all, it may be a fright this doctor is giving us. I don’t think so very much of his opinion, and—”

“I could not say that. Joyce is very highly thought of at Glasgow, and was selected from among all the competitors to take charge of this district, and that, in these days of competition, is no ordinary distinction. And it is on this very point I came to speak to you. You got my pencil-note at dinner? Very well. Just now you contented yourself with asking a question of Gretchen—”

“She said Madeleine was asleep, and would not let me into the room.”

“And quite rightly; but I went in to the bedside. Madeleine is asleep certainly; but her sleep is restless, broken, and decidedly feverish. There is not the smallest doubt that Dr. Joyce is right

in his opinion, and that she is attacked with scarlet-fever."

"You think so, Muriel?" said Kilsyth anxiously. "I mean not blindly following Joyce's opinion; but do you think so yourself?"

"I do; and not I alone, but half the house thinks so too. How do they know it? Heaven knows how these things ever get known, but they get wind somehow; and you will see that by to-morrow there will be a general flight. It is on this point that I have come to speak to you, if you will give me five minutes."

"Of course, Muriel; of course, my lady. But I think I've done the best that could be done; at all events, the first thing that occurred to me after you wrote me that note. Duncan Forbes had been saying in the drawing-room before dinner, before you came in, that the great London fever-physician, Dr. Wilmot, was staying at Burnside, away from here about fifty miles, with old Sir Saville Rowe, whom I recollect when I was a boy. Duncan had left him this morning, and he was going to stay at Burnside just a day or

two longer ; and I sent one of the men with a telegram to the station, to ask Dr. Wilmot to come over at once, and see Maddy."

Lady Muriel was so astonished at this evidence of prompt action on her husband's part that she remained silent for a minute. Then she said,

"That was quite right, quite right so far as Madeleine was concerned ; but my visit related rather to other people. You see, so soon as it is actually known that there is an infectious disorder in the house, the house will be deserted. Now my question is this : will it not be better to announce it to our guests, making the best and the lightest of it, as of course one naturally would, rather than let them—"

"Ye-es, I see what you mean, my lady," said Kilsyth slowly ; "and of course it would not do to keep people here under false pretences, and when we knew there was actual danger. Still I think as this story of scarlet-fever is only Joyce's opinion, and as I have telegraphed for Dr. Wilmot, who will be here to-morrow ; and as it seems strange, you know, to think that poor darling Maddy

should be the cause of any one's leaving Kilsyth, perhaps, eh? one might put off making the announcement until Joyce's opinion were corroborated by Dr. Wilmot."

"I am afraid the mischief is already done, Alick, and that its results will be apparent long before Dr. Wilmot can reach here," said Lady Muriel. "However, let us sleep upon it. I am sure to hear whether the news has spread in the house long before breakfast, and we can consult again." And Lady Muriel took leave of her husband, and retired to her room.

Trust a woman for observation. Lady Muriel was perfectly right. The nods and shoulder-shrugs and whisperings which she had observed in the drawing-room 'had already borne fruit. On her return to her own room she saw a little note lying on her table—a little note which, as she learned from Pinner, her attendant, had just been brought by Lady Fairfax's maid. It ran thus :

"DEAREST LADY MURIEL,—A *frightful* attack

of neuralgia (*my neuralgia*)—which, as you know, is so *awful*—has been hanging over me for the last three days, and now has come upon me in its *fullest force*. I am quite out of my mind with it. I have striven—O, how I have striven!—to keep up and try to forget it, when surrounded by your pleasant circle, and when looking at your *dear self*. But it is all in vain. I am in *agonies*. The torture of the rack itself can be *nothing* to what I am suffering to-night.

“Poor dear Sir Benjamin Brodie used to say that I should never be well in a *northern* climate. I fear he was right. I fear that the air of this darling Kilsyth, earthly Paradise though it is—and I am sure that I have found it so during three weeks of bliss; O, such *happiness*!—is too bracing, too invigorating for poor me. But I should *loathe* myself if I were to make this *an open* confession. So I will steal away, dearest Lady Muriel, without making any formal adieux. When all your dear friends assemble at breakfast to-morrow, I shall be on my *sorrowing* way south, and only regret that my wretched health prevents

me longer remaining where I have been so entirely happy.

“With kindest regards to your dear husband, I am, dearest Lady Muriel, ever your loving

“EMILY FAIRFAX.

“P.S.—I have told my maid to beg some of your people to get me horses from the Kilsyth Arms; so that I shall *speed* away early in the morning without disturbing any one. I hope dear Madeleine will soon be *quite herself* again.”

Lady Muriel read this letter through twice with great calmness, though a very scornful smile curled her lip during its perusal. She then twisted the note up into a wisp, and was about to burn it in the flame of the candle, when she heard a short solemn tap at her chamber-door. She turned round, bade Pinner open the door, and looked with more displeasure than astonishment at the Duchess of Northallerton, who appeared in the entrance. The Duchess had the credit in society of being a “haughty-looking woman.” Her stronghold in life, beyond the fact

of her being a duchess, had been in her Roman nose and arched eyebrows. But, somehow, haughty looks become wonderfully modified in *deshabillé*, and Roman noses and arched eyebrows lose a good deal of their potency when taken in conjunction with two tight little curls twisted up in hairpins, and a headdress which, however much fluted and gauffered, is unmistakably a nightcap. The Duchess's nocturnal adornments were unmistakably of this homely character, and her white wrapper was of a hue, which, if she had not been a duchess, would have been pronounced dingy. But her step was undoubtedly tragic, and the expression of her face solemn to a degree. Lady Muriel received her with uplifted eyebrows, and motioned her to a chair. The Duchess dropped stiffly into the appointed haven of rest; but arched her eyebrows at Pinner with great significance.

"You can go, Pinner. I shall not require you any more," said Lady Muriel; adding, "I presume that was what you wished, Duchess?" as the maid left the room.

"Precisely, dear Muriel; but you always were

so wonderfully ready to interpret one's thoughts. I remember your dear mother used to say—but I won't worry you with my stories. I came to speak to you about dear Madeleine."

"Ye-es," said Lady Muriel quietly, finding the Duchess paused.

"Well, now, she's worse than any of them suspect. Ah, I can see it by your face. And I know what is the matter with her. Don't start; I won't even ask you; I won't let you commit yourself in any way; but I know that it's measles."

Lady Muriel kept her countenance admirably while the Duchess proceeded. "I know it by a sort of instinct. When Madeleine first complained of her head, I looked narrowly at her, and I said to myself, 'Measles! undoubtedly measles!' Now, you know, Muriel, though there is nothing dangerous in measles to a young person like Madeleine,—and she will shake them off easily, and be all the better afterwards,—they are very dangerous when taken by a person of mature age. And the fact is, the Duke has never

had them—never. When Errington was laid up with them, I recollect the Duke wouldn't remain in the house, but went off to the Star and Garter, and stayed there until all trace of the infection was gone. And he's horribly afraid of them. You know what cowards men are in such matters; and he said just now he thought there was a rash on his neck. Such nonsense! Only where his collar had rubbed him, as I told him. But he's dreadfully frightened; and he has suggested that instead of waiting till the end of the week, as we had intended, we had better go to-morrow."

"I think that perhaps under all circumstances it would be the best course," said Lady Muriel, quite calmly.

"I knew your good sense would see it in the right light, my dear Muriel," said the Duchess, who had been nervously anticipating quite a different answer, and who was overjoyed. "I was perfectly certain of your coincidence in our plan. Now, of course, we shall not say a word as to the real reason of our departure—the Duke, I know, would not have that for the world. We

shall not mention it at Redlands either ; merely say we—O, I shall find some good excuse, for Mrs. Murgatroyd is a chattering little woman, as you know, Muriel. And now I won't keep you up any longer, dear. You'll kindly tell some one to get us horses to be ready by—say twelve to-morrow. Stay to luncheon? No, dear. I think we had better go before luncheon. The Duke, you see, is so absurd about his ridiculous rash. *Good-night, dear.*" And the Duchess stalked off to tell the Duke, who was not the least frightened, and whose rash was entirely fictitious, how well she had sped on her mission.

Lady Muriel accurately obeyed the requests made to her in Lady Fairfax's letter, and verbally by the Duchess ; and each of them found their horses ready at the appointed time. Lady Emily departed mysteriously before breakfast ; but as the Duchess's horses were not ordered till twelve, and as the post came in at eleven, her grace had time to receive a letter from Mrs. Murgatroyd, of Redlands, whither they were next

bound, requesting them to postpone their arrival for a day or two, as a German prince, who had by accident shot a stag, had been so elated by the feat, that he had implored to be allowed to stay on, with the chance of repeating it; and as he occupied the rooms intended for the Duke and Duchess, it was impossible to receive them until he left. After reading this letter, the Duchess went to Lady Muriel, and expressed her opinion that she had been too precipitate; that, after all, nothing positive had been pronounced; that there were no symptoms of the Duke's rash that morning, which had been undoubtedly caused, as she had said last night, by his collar, and which was no rash at all; and that perhaps, after all, their real duty was to stay and help their dear Muriel to nurse her dear invalid. But they had miscalculated the possibility of deceiving their dear Muriel. Lady Muriel at once replied that it was impossible that they could remain at Kilsyth; that immediately on the Duchess's quitting her on the previous night she had made arrangements as to the future disposition of the rooms which

they occupied ; that she would not for the world take upon herself the responsibility which would necessarily accrue to her if any of them caught the disease ; and that she knew the Duchess's own feelings would tell her that she, Lady Muriel, however ungracious it might seem, was in the right in advising their immediate departure. The Duchess tried to argue the point, but in vain ; and so she and the Duke, and their servants and baggage, departed, and passed the next three days at a third-rate roadside inn between Kilsyth and Redlands, where the Duke got lumbago, and the Duchess got bored ; and where they passed their time alternately wishing that they had not left Kilsyth, or that the people at Redlands were ready to receive them.

Very little difference was made by the other guests at Kilsyth in the disposition of their day. If they were surprised at the sudden defection of the Northallertons and Lady Fairfax, they were too well-bred to show it. Charley Jefferson mooned about the house and grounds, a thought more disconsolate than ever ; but he was the only

member of the party who at all bemoaned the departure of the departed. Lady Dunkeld congratulated her cousin Muriel on being rid of "those awful wet blankets," the Northallertons. Captain Severn, in whispered colloquy with his wife, "hoped to heaven Charley Jefferson would see what a stuck-up selfish brute that Emily Fairfax was." Lord Roderick Douglas and Mr. Pitcairn went out for their stalk; and all the rest of the company betook themselves to their usual occupations.

"Where's her ladyship?"

"In the boudoir, sir, waiting for the doctor."

"What doctor? Dr. Joyce?"

"And the strange gentleman, sir. They're both together in Miss Madeleine's room."

"Ah, Muriel! So Dr. Wilmot has arrived?"

"Yes, and gone off straight with Joyce to Madeleine. You see I was right in recommending you to go out as usual. Your fine London physician never asked for you, never mentioned your name."

“Well, perhaps you were right. I should have worried myself into a fever here; not that I’ve done any good out—missed every shot. What’s he like?”

“He! Who? Dr. Wilmot? I had scarcely an opportunity of observing, but I should say *brusque* and self-sufficient. He and Joyce went off at once. I thanked him for coming, and welcomed him in your name and my own; but he did not seem much impressed.”

“Full of his case, no doubt; these men never think of anything but—Ah, here he is!—Dr. Wilmot, a thousand thanks for this prompt reply to my hasty summons. Seeing the urgency, you’ll forgive the apparent freedom of my telegraphing to you.”

“My dear sir,” said Wilmot, “I am only too happy to be here; not that, if you could have engrossed the attention of this gentleman, there would have been any necessity for the summons. Dr. Joyce has done every thing that could possibly be done for Miss Kilsyth up to this point.”

“*A laudato viro laudari,*” murmured Dr. Joyce.

“But, fortunately or unfortunately, as I learn from him, a district of thirty miles in circumference looks to him for its health. Now I am, for the next few days at least, a free man, and at liberty to devote myself to Miss Kilsyth.”

“And you will do so?”

“With the very greatest pleasure. In two words let me corroborate the opinion already given. I understand by my friend here Miss Kilsyth has an attack, more or less serious, of scarlet-fever. She must be kept completely isolated from every one, and must be watched with unremitting attention. Dr. Joyce will send to Aberdeen for a skilled nurse, upon whom he can depend; until her arrival I will take up my position in the sick-room.”

“Ten thousand thanks; but—is there any danger?”

“So far all is progressing favourably. We must look to Providence and our own unremitting attention for the result.”

“I’m so hot and so thirsty, and these pillows

are so uncomfortable ! Thanks ! Ah, is that you, Dr. Wilmot ? I was afraid you had gone. You won't leave me—at least not just yet—will you ?”

“ Not I, my dear. There—that's better, isn't it ? The pillow is cooler, and the lemonade—”

“ Ah, so many thanks ! I'm very weak to-night ; but your voice is so kind, and your manner, and—”

“ There ; now try and sleep.—Good heavens, how lovely she is ! What a mass of golden hair falling over her pillow, and what a soft, innocent, childish manner ! And to think that only this morning I—ah, you must never hear the details of this case, my dear old master. When I get back to town I will tell you the result : but the details—never.”

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. WILMOT.

“ I WONDER what sort of woman Chudleigh Wilmot’s wife is,” was a phrase very often used by his acquaintances ; and the sentiment it expressed was not unnatural or inexcusable. There are some men concerning whom people instinctively feel that there is something peculiar in their domestic history, that their every-day life is not like the every-day life of other people. Sometimes this impression is positive and defined ; it takes the shape of certain conviction that things are wrong in that quarter ; that So-and-so’s marriage is a mistake, a misfortune, or a calamity, just as the grade of the blunder makes itself felt by his manner, or even by the expression of the countenance. Sometimes the impression is quite vague, and the questioner is conscious only that

there must be something of interest to be known. The man's wife may be dear to him, with a special dearness and nearness, too sacred, too much a part of his inmost being to be betrayed to even the friendliest eyes; or there may be an estrangement, which pride and rectitude combine to conceal. At all events—and whichever of these may be the true condition of affairs, or whatever modification of them may be true—the man's acquaintances feel that there is something in his domestic story different from that of other men, and they regard him with a livelier curiosity, if he be a man of social or intellectual mark, in consequence.

It was in the vaguest form that the question, "What sort of a woman is Chudleigh Wilmot's wife?" suggested itself to his acquaintances. Naturally, and necessarily, the greater number of those to whom the rising man became known knew him only in his professional capacity; but that capacity involved a good deal of knowledge, and not a little social intercourse; and there was hardly one among their number who did not say,

sooner or later, to himself, or to other people, "I wonder what sort of woman Chudleigh Wilmot's wife is?"

This question had been asked mentally, and of each other, by several of the inmates of the old mansion of Kilsyth; while the grave, pre-occupied, and absorbed physician dwelt within its walls, devoting all his energies of mind and body to the battle with disease, in which he was resolved to conquer. But no one who was there, or likely to be there, could have answered the question, strange to say—not even Wilmot himself.

Chudleigh Wilmot's marriage had come about after a fashion in which there was nothing very novel, remarkable, or interesting. Mabel Darlington was a pretty girl, who came of a good family, with which Wilmot's mother had been connected; had a small fortune, which was very acceptable to the young man just starting in his arduous profession; and was as attractive to him as any woman could have been at that stage of his life. Partly inclination, partly convenience, and

in some measure persuasion, were the promoters of the match. Wilmot knew that a medical man had a better chance of success as a married than as a single man; and as this was a fixed, active, and predominant idea among his relatives and friends—in fact, an article of faith, and a perpetual text of continual discourses—he had everything to encourage him in the design which had formed itself, though somewhat faintly, in his mind, when he renewed his acquaintance with Miss Darlington, on the occasion of her appearance at his mother's house in the character of a “come out” young lady. He had often seen her as a child and a little girl, being himself at the time a somewhat older child and a much bigger boy; but he had never entertained for her that disinterested, ardent, wretchedness-producing passion known as “calf love;” so that the impression she made upon him at a later period owed nothing to earlier recollection. His mother liked the girl, and praised her eloquently and persistently to Chudleigh; so eloquently and persistently indeed, that if he had not happened to be of her opinion from the

beginning, she would probably have inspired him with a powerful dislike to Miss Darlington, by placing that young lady in his catalogue of bores. He was not by any means the sort of man to marry a woman for whom he did not care at all, to please his mother, or secure his own prosperity ; but he was just the sort of man to care all the more for a girl because his mother liked her, and to make up his mind to marry her, if she would have him, the more quickly on that account.

The courtship was a short one ; and even in its brief duration Chudleigh Wilnot never felt, never tried to persuade himself, that Mabel was his first object in life. He knew that his profession had his heart, his brain, his ambition in its grasp ; that he loved it, and thought of it, and lived for it in a way, and to a degree, which no other object could ever compete with. It never occurred to him for a moment that there was any injustice to Mabel in this. He would be an affectionate and faithful husband ; but he was a practical man—not an enthusiast, not a dreamer. If he succeeded—and he was determined to suc-

ceed—she would share his success, the realisation of his ambition, and would secure all its advantages to herself. A man to do real work in the world, and to do it as a man ought—as alone he could feel the answer of a good conscience in doing anything he should undertake—must put his work above and before every thing. He would do this; he would be an eminent physician, a celebrated and rich man; a good husband too; and his wife should never have reason to find fault with him, or to envy the wives of other men—men who might indeed be more sentimental and demonstrative, but who could not have a stronger sense of duty than he. Thus thought, thus resolved Mabel Darlington's lover; and very good thoughts, very admirable resolves his were. They had only one defect; but he never suspected its existence. It was a rather radical defect too, being this: that they were not those of a lover at all.

They were married, and all went very well with the modest and exemplary household. At first the Wilmot *ménage* was not so fashionably



located as afterwards; but Mrs. Wilmot's house was always a model of neatness, propriety, and the precise degree of elegance which the rising man's income justified at each level which he attained. Wilmot's mother continued to like her daughter-in-law, and to regard her son's marriage as most propitious, though she had sometimes a doubt whether she really did understand his wife quite so thoroughly as she had understood Mabel Darlington. But Wilmot's mother had now been dead some years. Mrs. Wilmot had no near relatives, and she was a woman of few intimacies; her life was placid, prosperous, conventional. She had, at the period with which this story deals, a handsome house, a good income, an agreeable and eminently respectable social circle; a handsome, irreproachable husband, rapidly rising into distinction; one intimate friend, and—a broken heart.

Chudleigh Wilmot's wife was young; if not beautiful, at least very attractive, accomplished, lady-like, and "amiable," in the generally accepted interpretation of that unsatisfactory word.

What better or what worse description could possibly be given? It describes a thousand women in a breath, and it designates not one in particular. There was only one person in existence who could have given a more clear, intelligible, and distinct description of Mrs. Wilmot than this stereotyped one. This person was her friend Mrs. Prendergast—a lady somewhat older than herself, and whose natural and remarkable quickness and penetration were aided in this instance by close acquaintance and sleepless jealousy. If Mrs. Prendergast had been an ordinary woman, as silly as her sisterhood and no sillier, the fact that she was extremely jealous of Mrs. Wilmot would have so obscured and perverted her judgment, that her opinion would not have been worth having. But Mrs. Prendergast was very unlike her sisterhood. Not only was she negatively less silly, but she was positively clever; and being severe, suspicious, and implacable as well, if not precisely a pleasant, she was at least a remarkable woman. Nothing obscured or perverted Mrs. Prendergast's judgment; neither did anything

touch her heart. She had mind, and a good deal of it; she had experience and tact, insight, foresight, and caution. She was a woman who might possibly be a very valuable friend, but who could not fail to be a very dangerous enemy. In such a nature the power of enmity would probably be greater than the power of friendship, and the one would be likely to crush the other if ever they came into collision. Mrs. Prendergast was Mrs. Wilmot's friend. Whether she was the friend of Mrs. Wilmot's husband remains to be seen. If she had been asked to say what manner of woman the rising man's wife was, and had thought proper to satisfy the inquirer, her portraiture might have been relied upon as implicitly for its truthfulness as that of the most impartial observer, which is saying at once that Mrs. Prendergast was a woman of exceptional mental qualities, and of a temperament rare among those charming creatures to whom injustice is easy and natural.

The two women were habitually much together. Mrs. Prendergast was a childless widow.

Mrs. Wilmot was a childless wife. Neither had absorbing domestic occupations to employ her,—each had a good deal of time at the other's disposal; hence it happened that few days passed without their meeting, and enjoying that desultory kind of companionship which is so puzzling to the male observer of the habits and manners of womankind. Their respective abodes were within easy distance of each other. Mrs. Prendergast lived in Cadogan-place, and Mrs. Wilmot lived in Charles-street, St. James's. When they did not see one another, they exchanged notes; and in short they kept up all the ceremonial of warm feminine friendship; and each really did like the other better than any one else in the world, with one exception. In Mrs. Wilmot's case the exception was her husband; in Mrs. Prendergast's, the exception was herself. There was a good deal of sincerity and warmth in their friendship, but on one point there was a decided inequality. Mrs. Prendergast understood Mrs. Wilmot thoroughly; she read her through and through, she knew her off by heart; but Mrs.

Wilmot knew very little of her friend—only just as much as her friend chose she should know. Which was a convenient state of things, and tended to preserve their pleasant and salutary relations unbroken. Mrs. Prendergast had played Eleanor Galligai to Mrs. Wilmot's Marie de' Medicis for a considerable time, and with uninterrupted success, when Chudleigh Wilmot was sent for, in the perplexity and distress at Kilsyth; and as a matter of course she had heard from his wife about his prolonged visit to Sir Saville Rowe, whom she was well aware Mrs. Wilmot disliked with the quiet, rooted, persistent aversion so frequently inspired in the breasts of even the very best and most conscientious of women by their husbands' intimate friends. Wilmot was utterly unconscious that his wife entertained any such feeling; and Sir Saville Rowe himself would have been hardly more astonished than Wilmot, if it had been revealed to him that the confidence and regard which existed between the former master and pupil were counted a grievance, and Wilmot's visit to Burnside resented, silently in-

deed, in grief rather than in anger, as an injury.

In this fact may be found the key-note to Mrs. Wilmot's character; a key-note often struck by her friend's hand, and never with an erring, a faltering, or a rough touch.

There was not much of the tragic element in Henrietta Prendergast's jealousy of Mabel Wilmot, but there was a great deal of the mean. When Mabel was a young girl, Henrietta was a not much older widow. She was Mabel's cousin; had married, when very young, a man who had survived their marriage only one year. She had more money than Mabel; their connections were the same; she had as much education, and even better manners. She met Chudleigh Wilmot on the occasion of his renewing his acquaintance with Mabel Darlington, and she was as much, though differently, fascinated with him as Mabel herself. She compared her qualifications with those of her cousin; and she arrived at the not unnatural conclusion that their charms were equal, supposing him incapable of discerning how much cleverer

a woman than Mabel she was,—and hers very superior, should he prove capable of understanding and appreciating her intellectual superiority. She forgot one simple element in the calculation, and it made all the difference—she forgot Mabel's prettiness. Henrietta Prendergast made very few mistakes, but she did constantly make one blunder; she forgot her plain face, she underestimated the power of beauty. Perhaps no plain woman ever does understand that power, ever does make sufficient allowance for it, when arrayed against her in any kind of combat; it is certain that Henrietta did not in this instance. It is certain that though Chudleigh Wilmot thought of marrying Mabel Darlington without being very much in love with her, he never thought of marrying Henrietta Prendergast at all.

And now, when she had come to the conclusion that Chudleigh Wilmot had not loved Mabel Darlington, and did not love his wife,—was, in short, a man to whom love was unknown, by whom it was unvalued, undesired,—she was still steadily, sleeplessly jealous of Mabel Wilmot. “I

would have made him love *me*,' she would say to herself, as she read the thoughts of her friend; "I would have been as ambitious for him as he is for himself; I would have shown him that his aim was the highest and the worthiest. I would have loved him, and sympathised with him too. She only loves him; she does not understand him. Why did she come in between him and me?" For this very clever woman had actually deluded herself into the belief that, but for Mabel, Chudleigh Wilmot would have loved, or at least have married her. She would have made him love her afterwards, as she said. So for a long time she disliked her cousin, and hankered after her cousin's husband, and believed that she would have been the best, the most suitable, and the happiest of wives to the man who evidently had not a wife of that pattern in Mabel, but who somehow did not seem to perceive the fact. That time had come to an end long before people at Kilsyth asked themselves and each other what sort of woman Chudleigh Wilmot's wife was. But though Mrs. Prendergast no longer hankered



after her cousin's husband, though the love, in which her active imagination had a large share, had given place to a much more real and genuine hatred, she was jealous of Mabel still. This woman's brain was larger than her heart; her intellectual was higher than her moral nature; and a lofty feeling would be more transient than a low one. She pitied Mabel Wilmot too, however contradictory such an assertion may seem to shallow perceptions, which do not recognise in life that nothing is so reasonably to be expected, so invariably to be found, as contradictions in character. She liked her, she understood her, but she was jealous of her—jealous because Mabel had the position she had vainly desired. If she had had her husband's love, Mrs. Prendergast would have been still more jealous of her, and would not have liked, because she could not have pitied her. But she knew she had not that; she had made the discovery as soon as Mabel, who had made it fatally soon.

What had the girl's ideal been? was a question none could answer, and which it is certain

her husband never asked. He was very kind to her ; she had every comfort, every luxury that he could give her ; but she lived in a world of which he knew nothing, and he in and for his profession. He could not have been brought to recognise the possibility of over devotion to the business of his life. He would not have listened to the advance of any claims upon his time, attention, or interest, beyond those which he fulfilled with enthusiasm in the interests of his work, and the courteous observance which he never denied to the rules of his well-regulated household. Chudleigh Wilmot was a clever man in many ways beside that one way in which he was eminently so ; but one study had long lain near his hand, and he had never given time or thought to it ; one book was close to him, and he had never turned its leaves—the study of his wife’s character, the book of his wife’s heart.

Mabel Wilmot was inveterately, incurably shy, extremely reserved and reticent by nature, and rather sullen. The latter fault of temper had made itself apparent to her husband very early

in their married life ; and having rebuked it without effect, he made the great mistake of treating it with disregard. He never noticed it now ; the symptoms escaped him, the disease did not interest him, and it grew and grew. Proud, cold in manner, distant ; scrupulously deferential and dutiful in externals ; silent, except where speech was necessary to the management of such affairs as lay within her sphere ; calmly indifferent, to all appearance, to all that did not absolutely concern her individually in the course of their life, her shyness and her sullenness were not perceptible to others now—never to him. He did not know that it was so much the worse ; he did not understand that it had been better to know and feel her faults than to be ignorant of her and them, unconscious of their growth, or their yielding, or their transformation into others, uglier, worse, harder of eradication, more hopeless of cure. He did not love her. The whole story was in that one sentence.

And she ? She loved him ; certainly not wisely, all things considered, and much too well

for her own peace. She had outgrown her girlhood since her marriage; and her character had hardened, darkened, deepened, everything but strengthened, with her advance into womanhood. The girl Chudleigh Wilmot had married, and the graceful languid woman who appeared barely conscious of, and not at all interested in, the fact of his existence, were widely different beings. Mabel had shrunk from the knowledge of the thralldom in which her love for her husband—her calm, cold, generous, irreproachable husband—held her when she had first realised its strength, when the growth of her own love had revealed to her that his was but a puny changeling, with all the sensitiveness of a shy, sullen, and reticent nature. She could not deny, but she could conceal the bondage in which it held her. The qualities of her heart and the defects of her temper had a fight for the mastery, and temper won. Chudleigh Wilmot, if he had been obliged to think about the matter, would have unhesitatingly declared that his wife's temper had improved considerably since the early days of their marriage:



the truth was, it had only lost impulsiveness, and acquired sulk and secretiveness.

All this, and the terrible pain at the young woman's unsatisfied heart,—the pain which devoured her the more ruthlessly as success waited more closely upon the devotion to his profession of the man she loved, and in whose life she had but a nominal share,—was well known to Henrietta Prendergast. It had been long in coming, that burst of agonised confidence, which had made her friend officially aware of all that her acute mind had long believed; but it had come, and like all the confidences of very shy people, it had been complete and expansive. All restraint was over. Mabel might yield to any mood now in Henrietta's presence; she might talk of him with pride, with love, with anger, with questioning wonder, with despair; she, whose armour of pride and silence no other hand, not even the hand of the husband she loved, had ever pierced, was defenceless, unarmed, at the mercy of her friend, who fancied she had supplanted her, who was jealous of her.

Chudleigh Wilmot had been nearly a week at Kilsyth, when Mrs. Prendergast, entering her cousin's drawing-room rather earlier than usual, found her agitated, and in a state of perplexity.

"I am so glad you have come, Henrietta," said Mrs. Wilmot, as she kissed her visitor. "I have been in such anxiety to see you. A message was sent early this morning from Mr. Foljambe—you know Wilmot's friend, Mr. Foljambe the banker, of Portland-place—requesting that he would go to him at once. The poor old man has the gout again very badly. Since then a note has come; written by himself too, and hardly legible. Poor creature! I'm sure he is in horrid pain. Here it is. You see he says, 'the enemy is advancing on the citadel'—he means his heart or his stomach, I suppose—and he entreats Wilmot to go to him at once. What ought I to do, Henrietta?"

"You must tell him, of course, that Mr. Wilmot is out of town. I should not say he was so far away as Scotland; I think the mere idea is

enough to terrify a nervous old man with a superstition in favour of a particular doctor."

"Yes, yes, you are right; so it is. But about Wilmot. Of course he will not like to leave Sir Saville's friends. He thinks more of Sir Saville than of any one in the world, I do believe."

"Hardly more, Mabel, than of his reputation and Mr. Foljambe, I should think. Why, this Mr. Foljambe is the oldest friend he has in the world—his godfather, his father's friend,—a childless old man, without kith or kin in the world, who may leave him a fortune any day, and is certain to leave him something very handsome! He would never be so mad or so ungrateful—is he of an ungrateful disposition, Mabel?"

"I don't know exactly," said Mrs. Wilmot, as her colour deepened, and tears rose to her dark gray eyes. "If he *has* any feeling, it is certainly for his friends—at least he wastes none of it on *me*."

"You are always brooding over that, Mabel," said her cousin, "and it is labour and sorrow wasted. No man is worth being miserable about,

dear, and Wilmot is no more worth it than his neighbours. Besides, this is a matter of business, you know, and we must look at it so. You had better telegraph at once, I think. Put on your bonnet, and come to the office; don't trust to a servant, and don't lose time. The message will take some time to reach him, at the quickest. I fancy Kilsyth is a long way from any station."

Her practical tone had a beneficial effect on Mabel. Besides, she brightened at the hope, the expectation of Wilmot's return before the appointed time. The two ladies drove to Charing-cross, and Mabel telegraphed to Wilmot:

Mr. Foljambe is dangerously ill. Come at once."

CHAPTER V.

A RESOLVE, AND ITS RESULTS.

THE illness of Madeleine Kilsyth engrossed the attention and engaged the sympathy of her father so completely, and so entirely blinded him to other considerations, that when he chanced to encounter a servant on his way to Wilmot's room, in whose hand he recognised the ominous yellow cover which indicated a telegraphic despatch, he immediately accompanied the man to the door. He then hardly gave his guest time to peruse the message before he said impetuously :

“Nothing to take you away from us, I trust. Pray tell me?” and the otherwise polite gentleman did his best to peer at the pencilled characters on the flimsy sheet of paper which Wilmot held in his hand. For a moment his eager question remained unanswered, and his guest stood

frowning and uncertain. The next, though the frown remained, the look of uncertainty passed away, and then Wilmot turned frankly to the impatient questioner and said :

“ This is a message from an old friend and patient of mine. He wants me very much, and asks me to return at once.”

“ And—and what will you do? *Must* you go?” asked the distressed father in a tone of the keenest anxiety.

“ I shall stay here, sir, until your daughter is out of danger. There are many who can replace me in London in Foljambe’s case ; there is no one who can replace me here in Miss Kilsyth’s.”

“ You are very good, Wilmot. I really can’t thank you sufficiently,” said Kilsyth, immensely relieved.

“ No need to thank me at all, my dear sir,” said Wilmot. “ And now I will make my report to you, which no doubt you were coming to hear.”

The two gentlemen had rather a long talk, and on its completion Wilmot returned to his

room to write letters; and Kilsyth went to tell Lady Muriel that they had had a narrow escape of losing Wilmot, but he had determined to disregard the message, and stay by Madeleine. Did she not think Wilmot a very fine fellow? Had she not perfect confidence in his skill? and was not the interest he was taking in Madeleine's case extraordinary? To all these queries the Lady Muriel made answer in the affirmative, with heightened colour and brightened eyes, which, if Kilsyth had happened to notice those phenomena at all, he would have ascribed to an increase of feeling towards Madeleine; to be hailed, on his part, with much gratitude and delight. But Kilsyth did not happen to notice them at all.

Chudleigh Wilmot was a man accustomed to act promptly on a resolution; and perhaps, like many more of similar temperament, likely to act all the more promptly when the motives of that resolution were not quite clear or quite justifiable before his own judgment. In the present instance he certainly did not act with perfect candour towards himself. He made very much to himself

of his apprehensions concerning the result of Madeleine's illness, and his absolute want of confidence in the skill of Mr. Joyce. He resolutely shut his eyes to the long and substantial claims of Mr. Foljambe to paramount consideration on his part, and he determined to "see this matter out," as he phrased it, in his one-sided mental cogitation, by which he meant that he was determined to invest the temptation in his way with the specious name of duty, and to try to persuade himself that he had the assent of his conscience in pursuing a course opposed to his judgment. In pursuance of this determination, Chudleigh Wilmot wrote to his wife the following letter. To anyone familiar with the man's habits, it would have been suggestive, that when he had written "Kilsyth," and the date, he paused for several minutes, fidgeted with a stick of sealing-wax, got up and walked about the room, and, finally, began to write with unusual haste :

"MY DEAR MABEL,—Your telegram came all right; but my leaving this is quite impossible for

the present. You must tell Foljambe how I am circumstanced. Poor old fellow ! I am sorry for him ; but he will pull through, as usual ; and there is nothing to be done for him which anyone else cannot do just as well as myself. He had better see Whittaker ; or, if he does not like him for any reason—and the dear old boy *is* whimsical—let him see Perkins : tell him I recommend either confidently. You had better go and see him, if your cold is all right again, and cheer him up. As for me, I am effectually imprisoned here until this case decides itself one way or the other. Miss Kilsyth could not possibly be left to the care of the country doctor here ; and there is no one within any *possible* distance but Sir Saville, who would not *stay*, supposing he would *come*, which is doubtful. The same answer must be given in all cases for the next week or so. There is no use in anyone telegraphing for me. The country about here is beautiful ; but of course I don't see much of it. The Kilsyths are pleasant people in their way, and full of gratitude to me. Lady Muriel talks of making your acquaintance when

they come to town. Nothing of consequence at home, I suppose? Tell Whittaker to look after Foljambe very zealously, if he will have him.—

Yours affectionately,

C. WILMOT.

“ P.S. The case is malignant scarlet-fever, and my patient and I are in quarantine. Kilsyth is in great trouble—devoted to his daughter.”

When he had sealed this letter, and left it on the table for the post, Wilmot once more went to his patient's room. The suffering girl had fallen into an uneasy slumber; her face, with the disfiguring flush invading its fairness, was turned towards the door, the heavy eyes were closed, and the parched red lips were open. With a skilful noiseless touch, Wilmot lifted the restless head to an easier attitude upon the pillow, and moistened the dry mouth. The girl's golden hair had slipped out of the silken net which had confined it, and a quantity of its thick tresses was caught in one hot hand. Wilmot released the tangled hair, laid the hand upon the smooth coverlet, looked long at the young face, and then, stepping gently to the

window where the nurse was sitting, asked how long the patient had been sleeping. Ever since he had left her, it seemed. Lady Muriel had been there, "leastways at the dressing-room door," the nurse added, and had wanted to see him particularly, she (the nurse) thought, about sending the children out of the way of infection. Lady Muriel also asked whether they were not going to cut off Miss Kilsyth's hair.

"Which it does seem a pity, poor dear!" said the nurse, speaking in the skilful whisper which does not disturb the patient, and is the most difficult of tones to acquire; and throwing a motherly glance at the sleeping girl, who just then moaned painfully.

"Cut off her hair!" said Wilmot,—as if the mere notion were a horrid barbarism, which he could not contemplate as a possibility; "certainly not—it is entirely unnecessary."

"Well, sir," said the nurse, "it's mostly done in fevers. Wherever I've nursed, I've always done it, first thing."

Wilmot turned red and hot. Why should he

shrink from sanctioning or ordering the sacrifice in this case, as he had done in a thousand others without a thought of hesitation or regret, just like any other detail? Why, indeed? if not because those were the *thousand* cases, while this was the *one*. But he did not face the question; he turned aside from it—turned aside, with his eyes piercing the gloom of the shaded room, in search of the gleam of the golden locks. “No, no,” he thought, “the ‘little head sunning over with curls’ shall ‘shine on,’ if I can manage it.” So he told the nurse that was a matter for after consideration, and that she was to have him called when Miss Kilsyth should wake; and he went out for a solitary walk.

Lady Muriel was most grateful to Dr. Wilmot for the care and skill which he exercised in Madeleine’s case. Scarcely Kilsyth himself was more unremitting in his inquiries after the patient, more anxious as to the result. But husband and wife were actuated by totally different motives. The man feared lest the hope of his life should be quenched, the woman lest the object of her

ambition should be frustrated; the man dreaded the loss of his darling, the woman the confusion of her scheme. For Lady Muriel had a scheme in connection with Madeleine Kilsyth, which it may be as well at once to declare.

It is Mr. Longfellow who informs us that no one is so accursed by fate, no one so utterly desolate, but some heart, though unknown, responds unto his own. When Lady Muriel Inchgarvie was running her career of two London seasons, waiting for the arrival of the man whom she could persuade herself into marrying, and whom she could persuade into marrying her; while Mr. Burton and Sir Coke Only were fluttering like moths round her brilliant light,—the world, which thinks it marks everything, and which hugs itself in appreciation of its wonderful sagacity and perspicacity, and which had already supremely settled that Lady Muriel had no heart to lose, little knew that its sentence was a just one—simply because Lady Muriel had lost her heart. There was a connection of the house of Inchgarvie, a tall thin Scotchman, named Stewart

Caird, a barrister of Lincoln's-inn, who had been a long time settled in London, and who, in virtue of his aristocratic connections, his perfect gentlemanliness, and his utter harmlessness—for everyone knew that poor Stewart merely lived from hand to mouth, by the exercise of his profession, and by writing in the law magazines and reviews—was asked into a good deal of society. He was a languid, consumptive-looking man, with a high hectic colour, and deep-violet eyes, and a soft tremulous voice; and after he had claimed kinship with Lady Muriel, and had his claim allowed, he found plenty of opportunities of meeting her constantly, and on every occasion he was to be found by her side. This was the one chance which fortune had bestowed on Muriel Inchgarvie of loving and being simultaneously beloved; and it is but fair to say that she availed herself of it. Not for one instant did either of them think of the hopelessness of their passion. Lady Muriel well knew that a marriage with Stewart Caird was simply impossible; and Stewart Caird knew it too, possessing at the same time the additional know-

ledge, that even if family affairs could have been squared by his coming into the immediate heritage of fabulous wealth, there was yet a slight drawback in the fact that his lungs could not possibly hold out beyond six months. And yet they went on loving and fooling : to her the mere fact that there could never be any ties between them was, as it always has been, an incentive to a quasi-romantic attachment ; to him, with the perfect conviction that he was a doomed man, the love of a pretty high-bred woman softened the terrors of death, and prevented him from dwelling on his fate. So they went on ; the world taking little heed of them, and they ignoring the world ; he growing weaker and weaker, but always disguising his weakness, until one night in the height of the season, when Lady Muriel, dressed for a ball, received a short pencil-note, feebly scrawled : " If you would see me before I die, come at once.—S. C. You know me well enough to be certain that this is no romantic figure of speech." The writing, feeble throughout, trailed off at last into scarcely legible characters. Lady Muriel

wrote one hasty line to the lady who was to be her chaperon, pleading illness as her excuse for not fetching her, threw a thick cloak and hood over her ball-dress and her ivy-wreathed hair, and told the coachman, who was devoted to her, to drive her to Old-square, Lincoln's-inn. There, propped up by pillows, and attended by a hired nurse, who was by no means reluctant to take a hint, and, accompanied by a spirit-bottle, to betake herself to a further room, she found poor Stewart Caird, with large bistre rings round his eyes and two flaming red spots on his hollow cheeks. Between the attacks of a racking cough, he told her that his end was nigh; that he had long foreseen it, but that he could not deny himself the privilege of winning her love. He acknowledged the selfishness of the act; but trusted she would pardon him, when he assured her that the knowledge that she cared for him had inexpressibly lightened the last few months of his earthly career, and that he should die more happily, knowing that he left one regretful heart behind him. He said this in a voice which was tolerably firm at first, but which,

touched by her sobs, grew more and more tremulous, and finally broke down, when, in an access of emotion, she flung her arms round him, and clasped him to her heart. How long they remained thus tranced in love and grief neither ever knew; it was the first, the last wild access of passion that ever was to accrue to either. The future, so imminent to one of them at least, was unthought of, and they lived but in the then present fleeting moment. But before they parted Stewart spoke to Muriel of his younger brother Ramsay, who had been left to his care, and whom he was now leaving to the mercy of the world. For Muriel there was, he said he was persuaded, a career in life. When it fell to her, when she was enjoying it, would she, for the sake of him who had loved her—ah, so deeply and so dearly!—whose life she had cheered, and who with his dying breath would call upon and bless her name—would she watch over and provide for Ramsay Caird? With the dying man's hand in hers, with her arm round his neck, with her eyes looking into his, even then glazed and wandering, Muriel swore to fulfil his

wishes, and to undertake this charge. Within forty-eight hours Stewart Caird was dead ; within six weeks after his death Muriel Inchgarvie was the pledged wife of Kilsyth ; and within a fortnight of her betrothal she had hit upon a plan for the future of her dead lover's brother.

Ramsay Caird's future career in life was, as Lady Muriel decided, to be one with Madeleine Kilsyth's, and his fortune was to come to him through his wife. Madeleine's godfather, a childless, rich, old Highland proprietor, an old friend and neighbour of Kilsyth's, had at his death left her twenty thousand pounds, to be hers on her coming of age, or on her marrying with her father's consent. A pleasant competence in itself, but a princely fortune for a young man of small ideas like Ramsay Caird, who was earning a very precarious salary, given to him more from kindness than from any deserts of his, in the office of the Edinburgh agent to several large estates. Soon after her marriage Lady Muriel sent for the young man to Kilsyth, found him gentlemanly and unassuming, sufficiently shrewd to comprehend the

extremely delicate hints which she gave him as to the course which she wished him to adopt, and sufficiently delicate to prevent his at once plunging *in medias res*. Since then he had been frequently at Kilsyth, and had done his best to make himself agreeable to Madeleine. He was a good-looking, gentlemanly, quiet young man, without very much to say for himself, beyond the ordinary society talk, in which he was fairly glib; he had the names of all the members of all the families for whom his principal was agent at his tongue's end; had seen many of them personally, —even knew the appearance of the rest by photograph; kept himself well posted in their movements, through the medium of the fashionable journals; and so could fairly hold his own in the conversation of the people he was thrown amongst. Lady Muriel, who was as clever as she was proud and ambitious, reckoned Ramsay Caird up to a nicety; saw exactly how far he was suitable for her plans, and thought there was little doubt of Madeleine's being captivated by the handsome glib young man who paid her such respectful homage.

But for once in her life Lady Muriel was wrong. It is but fair to say that Ramsay Caird never neglected one of the opportunities so frequently thrown in his way ; that he never once committed himself in any possible manner ; that he did not on every occasion seek to recommend himself to the girl's favour ; but it is certain that he failed in making the smallest impression on her. Lady Muriel, watching the progress of affairs with the greatest interest, soon felt this, and was at first dispirited ; afterwards consoling herself by the thought that the girl was passionless and devoid of feeling, but so docile withal, that it would be only necessary for her father to suggest her acceptance of Mr. Caird for her at once to fall into the idea. Thoroughly comforted by this notion, Lady Muriel had of late given herself no uneasiness in the matter ; contenting herself by asking Ramsay Caird to spend a week or two now and then at Kilsyth, by throwing him frequently into Madeleine's society when there, and by keeping up a perpetual gently flowing perennial stream of laudation of her young *protégé* to her husband.

On Wilmot's return to the house, he inquired whether it would be convenient to Lady Muriel to receive him.

"My lady" was in her own sitting-room, and would be very happy to see Dr. Wilmot. So, he went thither, and found the mistress of the mansion alone, and looking to very great advantage in the midst of all the luxuries and refinements with which wealth—in this instance aided by good taste—adorns life. Her rich and simple dress, her finished graceful ease of manner, her sunny beauty, and the perfect propriety with which she expressed interest and anxiety concerning her step-daughter, made her a very attractive object to Wilmot. He had not yet discovered that she did not in the least experience the sentiments which she glibly expressed in phrases of irreproachable *tournure*; he did not suspect her of insincerity or want of feeling, or in fact of any fault. Everything and everybody at Kilsyth wore the best and fairest of aspects in the eyes of Chudleigh Wilmot, who was, nevertheless, a very far-seeing and an eminently practical man. Thus,

he only furnished another proof of the often-proven truth, that his most distinguishing qualities are the first to fail a man, when judgment is superseded by passion. That is a strong word to use in such a case as Chudleigh Wilmot's, at least to use so soon; but the boundary between the feeling which he entertained knowingly, and the passion which was growing out of it unconsciously, was very slight, and was destined so soon to be destroyed that the word may pass unblamed.

The earlier portion of Lady Muriel Kilsyth's conversation with Wilmot was naturally devoted to Madeleine. She thanked him, with all her own peculiar grace and fluency, for his attention, his "priceless care," for his resolution, which Kilsyth had communicated to her, to remain with them in this great trouble. She asked him to tell her his "real opinion;" and he told it. He told her Madeleine was in danger; but that he hoped, and thought, and believed, her life would be saved. He spoke with earnestness and feeling; and as he dwelt upon the youth, the beauty, and the sufferings of the girl, upon her exceeding

preciousness to her father (and gave Lady Muriel credit for sharing her husband's feelings far beyond what she deserved), the soft dark eyes fixed themselves upon him with much interest and curiosity. Deep feeling on any subject was unfamiliar to Lady Muriel; it was not the habit of her society, or included in the scheme of her own organisation, and she liked it for its strangeness. Their conversation lasted long; for when Wilmot was summoned to see his patient, Lady Muriel invited him to come again to her sitting-room; and he did so. The question of sending her children away was speedily decided in the negative; and then the talk rambled on over a great variety of subjects, and Lady Muriel regarded Wilmot with increasing interest and surprise, as she discovered more and more of his originality and fertility of mind. She was not a remarkably clever woman; but she had more brains and more cultivation than were at all common among her "set;" and she did occasionally grow very weary of the well-bred vapid talk, which was the only form of social intercourse assumed

in her circle. She had sometimes wondered whether something better was not to be found in the limits within which it would be proper for her to seek for it; but she had stopped at wonderment; she had not followed it up by effort; and now the very thing she had wished for had come to her, in the most unexpected form, and through the most unlikely channel. A doctor, a man whose name she had merely casually heard, an outsider, one whom in the ordinary course of events she would have never met, is called in to attend her step-daughter in fever, and all at once a new world opens upon Lady Muriel Kilsyth.

She was quick to receive impressions; and she felt at once that this day marked an epoch in her life. As this fine-looking, keen, intelligent man, in whose deep-set eyes, on whose massive forehead power was enthroned, bent those dark steady eyes upon her, seeming to read her soul, the frivolity of her life fell away from her, like a flimsy garment discarded, and she felt, she recognised the charm of superiority of intellect and strength of character. She drew him out

on the subjects which had the deepest interest for him, as a woman can, who has tact and perfect manners, even when her intellectual powers are in no way remarkable; and he enjoyed the happy sociable hours of the long, uninterrupted afternoon as much, or nearly as much, as she did. Lady Muriel was too quick and too true an observer to fail in discerning, before they had strayed very far into the pleasant paths of their desultory discourse, that there was very little sentimentality in Chudleigh Wilmot. A practical man, full of action, of ambition, of love of knowledge, and resolve to win the highest prizes it could bring him, he yet spoke and looked like a man whose feelings had been but little tried, and who would be slow to try them. Lady Muriel knew that Chudleigh Wilmot was a married man. The circumstance had been mentioned among the people in the house when he had first been talked of; and she was the first at Kilsyth to ask of herself, for she had no other to whom to address it, that frequent question, "What sort of woman is Chudleigh Wilmot's wife?" She could not have ex-

plained, but she did not question, the instinct which led her to say, as she went to her dressing-room, when their long colloquy at length came to a conclusion, "I am sure he does not care for her. I am sure it was not a love-match. I feel convinced he never was in love in his life, not in any real sense." And then, Lady Muriel Kilsyth sighed. Life was not yet an old story for either Lady Muriel or Chudleigh.

That evening Wilmot devoted himself to the patient, whose state was highly precarious; and though he sent reassuring messages to Kilsyth from time to time, he expressed far more hopefulness than he actually felt. He was conscious too of a strange sort of relief—a consciousness which should have shown him how he had deceived himself—as the conviction that his presence was indeed in the highest degree beneficial was confirmed by every passing hour. The girl's eyes—now bright and wandering, now dark and weary—turned in search of him, in every phase of the fever that was gaining on her, with such innocent trust and belief as touched him keenly to

his conscious heart. In the stillness of the night, when the very nurse slept, the physician bent down over the flushed face, and hushed the murmuring incoherent voice with the tenderest words, and soothed the sick girl—little more than a child she looked in her hopelessness and unrest—with all a woman's gentleness. What did he feel for the pretty young creature thus thrown on his skill, his kindness, his mercy! What revolution was the silent flight of time, during the hours of that night, working in Chudleigh Wilmot's life? He was learning the reality of that in which he had never believed; he was learning the truth of love. Now, when it was too late, when every barrier of honour, of honesty, of duty, and of principle stood between him and the object of the long-deferred, but terribly real, passion which took possession of him.

When the dawn was stealing into the sick girl's room, the change, the chill, which come with that ghastly hour to sickness and to health alike, in wakefulness, came to Madeleine, and she called in a high querulous tone for her father.

The nurse, then beside her, tried to soothe the girl; but vainly. She refused to lie down; she must, she would see her father. Wilmot, who knew that she was quite sensible, quite coherent, and who had feared to startle her by letting her see him, now came forward, and gently laid her back upon her pillow.

"You shall see your father in the morning," he said. "I am sure you would not have him disturbed now, my dear; would you?"

"No," she said, with a painful smile; "I would not—certainly not. I only wanted to know something; and you will tell me."

Her large blue eyes were fixed upon him; her small hand was stretched out to him with the frankness of a child.

"Of course, if I can, I will tell you."

"Sit down, then," she said, in the thick difficult voice peculiar to the disease which had hold of her.

He did not sit down, but knelt upon the floor by the bedside, and raised the pillows on his arm. Her innocent face was close to his.

"Speak as low as you like ; I can hear you," said Chudleigh Wilmot.

"I will," she whispered. "I thank you. I only wanted to ask my father—and I would rather ask you—if—if I am going to die."

Her lips were trembling. His sight grew dim as he answered :

"No, my dear. You are very ill ; but you are not going to die. You are going to get well—not immediately, but before long. You must be patient, you know ; and you must do everything you are desired to do."

"I will when I am sensible," she said ; "but I am not always sensible, you know."

"I know. You are quite sensible now, and the best patient I ever had. A great deal depends on yourself. I don't mean about not dying ; I mean about getting well sooner. Will you try now how long, being quite sensible, you can keep quiet?"

"I will," she answered, looking at him with the strange solemn gaze we see so often in the eyes of a child in mortal sickness. "I am so glad,

Dr. Wilmot, you are sure I am not going to die."

Not a shade of doubt of him; perfect trust in him, entire calm and serenity in the unruffled feeble voice. Her hand lay loosely in his, undisturbed except by an occasional feverish twitch; her head was supported by his arm, which held the pillows; his serious eyes scanned her face. So he knelt and so she lay as the dawn came; so he knelt and so she lay as the first rays of the sun came glancing in through the closed window-curtains; but they found the patient sleeping, and the steady watch of the physician unrelaxed.

So time passed, and Madeleine's illness took its course, and was met and fought and beaten at every turn by the skill and judgment, the coolness and the experience of the "rising man." So unwearied a watcher had never been seen in a sick-room; so cheerful a counsellor and consoler had rarely been sent to friends and relatives in anxiety and suspense. He was appreciated at his worth at Kilsyth. As for Kilsyth himself, he revered,



he esteemed, he next to worshipped Wilmot, holding him as almost superhuman. The nurse "had never seen such a doctor as him in all her born days, never ; and not severe neither ; but knowing as the best and wakefullest must have their little bit of rest at times." He won golden opinions from all within the old walls of Kilsyth, and more than all from its mistress.

On the whole, and despite his close and devoted attendance on his patient, Chudleigh Wilmot saw a great deal of Lady Muriel, and an infinite number of topics were discussed between them. Each day brought more extended, more appreciative comprehension of her guest to the by no means dull intellect of Lady Muriel ; and each day quickened her womanly perception and kindled her already keen and ready jealousy. When many days had gone by, and Lady Muriel would no longer have dreamed of denying to herself how much she admired Wilmot,—how utterly different he was from any other man whom she had ever known ; how much more interesting, how much more engrossing ; a man to be looked up to and

respected ; a man to suffice to all a woman's need of reverence and deference,—she would still have been far from acknowledging that she loved him ; but her acknowledgment or her denial would have made no difference in the fact. She did love him, in a lofty and reserved kind of way, in which no slur upon her honour, according to the world's code, which takes cognisance only of the letter of the law and ignores its spirit, was implied ; but with all her heart she loved him.

So now the situation was this. Chudleigh Wilmot loved one woman within the walls of the old mansion of Kilsyth ; and another woman, their inmate, loved him. Would she—the other, the older, the more experienced woman—discover his secret, and overwhelm him with its disgrace ? Time alone could tell that—time, of which there was not much to run ; for Wilmot had been a fortnight at Kilsyth before he could give its master the joyful intelligence that the fever had relaxed its grip of his child, and—barring the always present danger in scarlet-fever of relapse, or what is technically called “dregs”—Madeleine was safe.

Mabel Wilmot had written to her husband occasionally during the fortnight which had witnessed the rise and the crisis of Miss Kilsyth's illness. In her letters, which were few and sparing of details, she never alluded to the cause of her husband's unprecedented absence; Wilmot did not notice the omission. She gave him few details concerning herself; Wilmot did not observe their paucity. The glamour was over him; the enchanted land held him.

"I am not feeling much better," said Mabel in one of her letters; "but I daresay—indeed I have no doubt—the weather is against me; Whittaker thinks so too. I enclose his report. There is nothing new here, or of importance."

Chudleigh Wilmot accepted his wife's account of the state of things at home, and replied to her letters in his usual strain. He had failed to notice that she never alluded to Miss Kilsyth; or he would hardly have dealt with so much emphasis, or at such length, on the details of a case to which the recipient of his letters manifested such complete indifference.

Dr. Whittaker continued to report upon the cases to which he had been called in; and no more telegrams interrupted the concentration of Chudleigh Wilmot's attention upon the illness and convalescence of Madeleine Kilsyth.

CHAPTER VI.

AT KILSYTH.

THE routine of illness and anxiety, the dull monotony of an absorbing care, had rapidly settled down upon Kilsyth, immensely alleviated, of course, by the confidence imposed by Wilmot's presence. The influence of his skill, the insensible support of his calmness and self-reliance, were felt all through the household by those members of it to whom the life or death of Madeleine was a matter of infinite importance, and by those who felt a decent amount of interest, but could have commanded their feelings readily enough. As for Wilmot himself, he would have found it difficult to account for the absorption of feeling and interest with which he watched the case, had he been called upon to render any account of it to others. In his own mind he

shirked the question, and simply devoted himself day and night to his patient, leaving the house only once a day for a brief time, during which he would stride up and down the terrace in front of the house, gulping-in all the fresh air he could inhale; and then his place in the sick-chamber was taken by an old woman, who had years before been Madeleine's nurse, and who was now married and settled on the estate. Not since the old days of his house-surgeonship at St. Vitus's had Chudleigh Wilmot had such a spell of duty as this: the fact of his giving up his time in this manner to a girl with whom he had not exchanged twenty words, with whose friends he had no previous acquaintance, in whom he could have no possible interest, came upon him frequently in his enforced exercise on the terrace, in his long weary vigils in the sick-room; and each time that he thought it over, he felt or pronounced it to himself to be more and more inexplicable. In London he made it an inexorable rule never to leave his bed at night, unless the person sending



for him were a regular patient, no matter what might be their position in life, or the exigency of their case; and even among his own connection he kept strictly to consultation and prescription; he undertook no practical work, there were apothecaries and nurses for that sort of thing. He had a list of both, whom he could recommend, but he himself never paid any attention to such matters. And here he was acting as a combination of physician, apothecary, and nurse, dispensing the necessary medicines from the family medicine-chest, sitting up all night, concocting soothing drinks, and smoothing hot and uneasy pillows.

Why? Chudleigh Wilmot had asked himself that question a thousand times, and had not yet found the answer to it. Beauty in distress—and this girl, for all her mass of golden hair and her bright complexion and her blue eyes, could only be called pretty—beauty in distress was no more strange to Chudleigh Wilmot than to the hero of nautical melodrama at a transpontine theatre. He was constantly being called in to cases where he saw girls as young and as pretty as Madeleine

Kilsyth "hove down in the bay of sickness," as the said nautical dramatic hero forcibly expresses it. Scarcely a day passed that he was not for some few minutes by the couch of some woman of far superior attractions to this young girl, and yet of whom he had never thought in any but the most thoroughly professional manner, listening to her complaints, marking her symptoms, prescribing his remedies, and entering up the visit in his note-book, as he whirled away in his carriage, as methodically as a City accountant. But he had never felt in his life as he felt one bright afternoon when the wild delirium had spent its rage and died away, and the doctor sat by the girl's bedside, and held her hand, no longer dry and parched with fever, and bent over her to catch the low faint accents of her voice.

"You don't know me, Miss Kilsyth," said he gently, as he saw her dazed by looking up into his face.

"O yes," said Madeleine, in ever so low a voice,— "O yes; you are Doctor—Doctor—I cannot recollect your name; but I know you

were sent for, and I saw you before—before I was—”

“Before you were so ill; quite right, my dear young lady. I am Dr. Wilmot, and you have been very ill; but you are better now, and—please God—will soon be well.”

“Dr. Wilmot! O yes, I recollect. But, please, don’t think because I could not recall your name that I did not know you. I have known you all through this—this attack. I have had an indefinable sense of your presence about me; always kind and thoughtful and attentive, always soothing, and—”

“Hush, my dear child, hush! you must not talk and excite yourself just yet. You have had, as you probably know, a very sharp attack of illness; and you must keep thoroughly quiet, to enable us to perfect your recovery.”

“Then I’ll only ask one question and say one thing. The question first—How is papa?”

“Horribly nervous about you, but very well. Constant in his tappings at this door, unremitting in his desire to be admitted; to which requests

I have been obdurate. However, when he hears the turn things have taken, he will be reassured."

"That's delightful! Now, then, all I have to say is to thank you, and pray God to bless you for your kindness to me. I've known it, though you mayn't think so, and—and I'm very weak now; but—"

He had his strong arm round her, and managed to lay her back quietly on her pillow, or she would have fainted. As it was, when the bright blue eyes withdrew from his, the light died out of them, and the lids dropped over them, and Madeleine lay thoroughly exhausted after her excitement.

What *was* the reminiscence thus aroused? What ghost with folded hands came stealing out of the dim regions of the past at the sound of this girl's voice, at the glance of this girl's eyes? What bygone memories, so apart from everything else, rose before him as he listened and as he looked? He had not hit the trail yet, but he was close upon it.

The news that the extremity of danger was
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past was received with great delight by the guests at Kilsyth. With most of them Madeleine was a personal favourite, and all of them felt that a death in the house would have been a serious personal inconvenience. The Northallertons, Lady Fairfax, and Lord Towcester, were the only seceders; the others either had arranged for later visits elsewhere, or found their present quarters far too comfortable to be given up on the mere chance of catching an infectious disorder. Some of them had had it, and laughed securely; others feared that from the mere fact of their having been in the house when the attack took place, they were so "compromised" as to prevent their being received elsewhere; and one or two actually had the charity to think of their host and hostess, and stayed to keep them company, and to be of any service in case they might be required. Charley Jefferson belonged to this last class. Emily Fairfax little knew that by her selfish flight from Kilsyth she had entirely thrown away all her hold over the great honest heart that had so long held her image enshrined as its divinity.

She never gave a thought to the fact that when the big Guardsman used to hum in a deep baritone voice the refrain of a little song of hers—

“Loyal je serai
Durant ma vie”—

he was expressing one of the guiding sentiments of his life. Colonel Jefferson was essentially loyal; to shrink from a friend who was in a difficulty, to shuffle out of supporting in purse, person, or any way in which it might be requisite, a comrade who had a claim of old acquaintance or strong intimacy, was in his eyes worse than the majority of crimes for which people stand at the dock of the Old Bailey. In this matter he never swerved for an instant. He never gave the question of infection a thought; he had had scarlet-fever at Eton, and jungle-fever out in India, and he was as case-hardened, he said, as a rhinoceros. He took no credit to himself for being fearless of infection, or indeed for anything else, this brave simple-minded good fellow; but if anyone had been able to see the working of his heart, they would have known what credit he deserved for

holding to his grand old creed of loyalty to his friend, and for ignoring the whispers of the siren, even when she was as fascinating and potential as Emily Fairfax. When some one asked if he were going, he laughed a great sardonic guffaw, and affected to treat the question as a joke. When the disease was pronounced to be unmistakably infectious, he at once constituted himself as a means of communication between Dr. Wilmot and the outer world; and his honour and loyalty enabled him to face the fact that probably little Lord Towcester had followed Lady Fairfax to her next visiting-place, and was there administering consolation to her with great equanimity. When Dr. Wilmot came out for his half-hour's stride up and down the terrace, he generally found the Colonel and Duncan Forbes waiting for him; and these three would pace away together, the two *militaires* chatting gaily on light subjects calculated to relieve the tedium of the doctor, and to turn his thoughts into pleasanter channels, until it was time for him to go back to his duty. And when the worst was over, and Chudleigh Wilmot could have

longer and more frequent intervals of absence from the sick-room, it was Charley Jefferson who proposed that they should establish a kind of mess in the smoking-room, where the Doctor, who necessarily debarred himself from communion with the others at the dinner-table, might yet enjoy the social converse of such as were not afraid of infection. So a dinner-table was organised in the smoking-room, and Jefferson and Duncan Forbes invited themselves to dine with the Doctor. They were the next day joined by Mrs. Severn, who had all along wished to devote herself to the invalid, and had with the greatest difficulty been restrained from establishing herself *en permanence* as nurse in Madeleine's chamber; and Mr. Pitcairn asked for and obtained permission to join the party, and proved to have such a talent for imitation and such a stock of quaint Scotch stories as made him a very valuable addition to it. So the "Condemned Cell," as its denizens called it, prospered immensely; and by no means the least enjoyment in the house emanated from it.

Lady Muriel, seeing more and more of Wilmot,

as the closeness of his attendance on his patient became relaxed by her advance towards convalescence, and studying him with increased attention, learned to regard him with feelings such as no man of her numerous and varied acquaintance had ever before inspired her with. The impression he had made upon her in the first interview was not removed or weakened, and he presented himself to her mind—which was naturally inquiring, and possessed considerably more intelligence than she had occasion to use, in a general way, in her easy-going, prosperous, and conventional life—in the light of an interesting and remunerative study.

Lady Muriel's faultlessly good manners precluded the indulgence of any perceptible absence of mind; and she possessed the enviable faculty which some women of the world exhibit in such perfection, of carrying, or rather helping, on a conversation to which she was not in reality giving attention, and in which she did not feel the smallest particle of interest. The gallant *militaires*, the dashing sportsmen, the *grands seigneurs*, and the

ladies of distinction who were among her associates, and the gentlemen, at least of the number of her admirers, were accustomed to regard Lady Muriel's powers of conversation as something quite out of the common way; and so indeed they were—only these simple-minded and ingenuous individuals did not quite understand the direction taken by their uncommonness. It never occurred to them to calculate how much of her talking Lady Muriel did by means of intelligent acquiescent looks, graceful little bows, sprightly exclamations, a judicious expression of intense interest in the subject under discussion when it chanced to be personal to the other party to the discourse, and sundry other skilful and effective feminine devices. It never dawned upon them that one half the time she did not hear, and during the whole time she did not care, what was said; that her graceful manner was merely manner, and her real state of mind one of complete indifference to themselves and almost everyone besides. Not that Lady Muriel was an unhappy woman. Far from it. She was too sensible to be unhappy



without just cause ; and she certainly had not that. She perfectly appreciated her remarkably comfortable lot in life ; she estimated wealth, station, domestic tranquillity and respect, and the unbounded power which she exercised in her household domain, quite as highly as they deserved to be estimated ; and though as free from vulgarity of mind as from vulgarity of manner, she was not in the least likely to affect any sentimental humility or mistake about her own social advantages. She could as easily have bragged about them as forgotten them ; but just because she held them for what they were worth, and did not exaggerate or depreciate them, Lady Muriel was given to absence of mind ; and though neither unhappy, nor imagining herself so, she was occasionally bored, and acknowledged it. Only to herself though. Lady Muriel Kilsyth had no confidantes, no intimacies. Hers was the equable kind of prosperous life which did not require any ; and she was the last woman in the world to acknowledge a weakness which her truly admirable manners gave her power most successfully to conceal.

The touch of sorrow or anxiety is a sovereign remedy for *ennui*. It will succeed when all the resources to which the victims of that fell disease are accustomed to have recourse fail ignominiously. If Lady Muriel had loved Madeleine Kilsyth, the girl's illness would have put boredom to flight, with the first flush or shiver of fever, the first dimness of the eyes, the first tone of complaint in the clear young voice. But Lady Muriel did not love Madeleine, and did not pretend to herself that she loved her. Indeed Lady Muriel never pretended to herself. She had seen and understood that to deceive oneself is at once much easier and more dangerous than to deceive other people, and she avoided doing so on principle—on the worldly-wise principle, that is, by which she so admirably regulated her life—and reaped a rich harvest of popularity. She did not dislike the girl at all, and she would have been very sorry if she had died, partly for the sake of Kilsyth, whom she really liked and admired, and who would have broken his stout simple heart for his daughter—"much sooner and more surely



than for me," Lady Muriel thought; "but that is quite natural, and as it should be. She is the child of his first love, and I am his second wife, and he is quite as fond of me as I want him to be;"—for she was a thoroughly sensible woman, and would much rather not have had more love than she could reciprocate. But she was perfectly equable and composed. Throughout Madeleine's illness it did not cause her sorrow, though her manner conveyed precisely the proper degree of step-motherly concern which was called for under the circumstances; and she did not suffer from anxiety, being rationally satisfied that all the skill, care, and indulgence demanded by the exigencies of the case were liberally bestowed on Madeleine. Anxiety was quite uncalled for, and therefore did not chase away the brooding spirit of *ennui* from Lady Muriel.

The first thing that struck her particularly with regard to Chudleigh Wilmot was that she did not experience any sense of boredom in his presence. In fact it dissipated that ordinarily prevailing malady; she was really interested in everything

he talked about, really charmed by the manner in which he talked, and had no need whatever to draw on the ever-ready resources of her manner and *savoir faire*.

When Wilnot began to make his appearance freely among the small party at Kilsyth, and, after the usual inquiries—in which the serious and impressive tone at first observed was gradually discarded—to enter into general conversation, and to exercise all the very considerable powers which he possessed of making himself agreeable, Lady Muriel found out and admitted that this was the pleasantest time of the day. The interval between this discovery and her finding herself longing for the arrival of that time—dwelling upon all its incidents when she was alone, making it a central point in her life, in fact—was very brief.

With this new feeling came all the keen perception, the close observation, and the nascent suspicion which could not fail to accompany it, in such a “thorough” organisation as that of Lady Muriel. She began to take notice of everything



concerning Wilmot, to observe all his ways, and to watch with jealous scrutiny the degree of interest he displayed in all his surroundings at Kilsyth.

As Madeleine progressed in her recovery, Lady Muriel looked for some decline in the physician's absorption in the interest of her case. He would be less punctual, less constant in his attendance upon her; he would be more susceptible to influences from the outside world; he would be anxious to get away perhaps—at least he would no longer be indifferent to professional duties elsewhere; he would begin to weigh their respective claims, and would recognise the preponderance of those at a distance over that which he had already satisfied more than fully, more than conscientiously, with a fulness and expansion of sympathy and devotion rare indeed.

Wilmot was extremely popular among the little company at Kilsyth. Wonderfully popular, considering how much he was the intellectual superior of every man there; but then he was one of those clever men who never make their talents

obnoxious, and are not bent on forcing a perpetual recognition of their superiority from their associates. He allowed the people he was with to enjoy all the originality, wit, knowledge, and good fellowship that was in him, and did not administer the least alloy of mortification to their pride with it. When Lady Muriel forcibly acknowledged to herself, and would as frankly have acknowledged to anyone else, if anyone else would have asked her a question on the subject, that she held Dr. Wilmot to be the cleverest and most agreeable man she had ever met, she did but echo a sentiment which had found general expression among the party assembled at Kilsyth.

As the days went by, Lady Muriel began to feel certain misgivings relative to Wilmot. She did not quite like his look, his manner, when he spoke of Madeleine. She did not consider it altogether natural that he should never weary of Kilsyth's garrulity on the subject of his darling daughter. The physician, taking rest from his long and anxious watch, might well be excused if he had tired a little of questions and replies



about every symptom, every variation, and of endless stories of the girl's childhood, and laudation of her beauty, her virtues, and her filial love and duty. But Dr. Wilmot never tired of these things; he would, on the contrary, bring back the discourse to them, if it strayed away, as it would do under Lady Muriel's direction; and moreover she noticed, that no circumstances, no social temptation had power to detain him a moment from his patient, when the time he had set for his return to her side had arrived.

Taking all these things into consideration, and combining them with certain indications which she had noticed about Madeleine herself, Lady Muriel began to think the return of Dr. Wilmot to London advisable, and to perceive in its being deferred very serious risk to her scheme for the endowment of her young kinsman with the hand and fortune of her step-daughter. She was not altogether comfortable about its success, to begin with. Ramsay Caird had not as yet made satisfactory progress in Madeleine's favour. It was not because the girl had no power of loving in her

that she had listened without the smallest shadow of emotion to Mr. Ramsay Caird, but simply because Mr. Ramsay Caird had not had the tact, or the talent, or the requisite qualifications, or the good fortune to arouse the power of loving him in her. Lady Muriel was far too quick an observer, far too learned a student of human nature, not to read at a glance all that her step-daughter's looks revealed; and her knowledge of life at once informed her of the danger to her scheme. What was to be done? Wilmot must be got rid of, must be sent away without loss of time. His business was over, and he must go. That must be treated as a matter of course. He was called in as a professional man to exercise his profession; and the necessity of any further exercise of it having terminated, his visit was necessarily at an end. No possible suspicion of her real reason for wishing to get rid of him could arise. A married man, of excellent reputation, accustomed to being brought into the closest contact with women of all ages in the exercise of his profession—why, people would shout with laughter at the idea of her



bringing forward any idea of his flirtation with a girl like Madeleine! And Kilsyth himself—nothing, not even the influence which she possessed over him, would induce him for an instant to believe any such story. It was very ridiculous; it must be her own imagination; and yet— No; there was no mistaking it, that girl's look; she could see it even then. Even if Ramsay Caird were not in question, it was a matter which, for Madeleine's own sake, must be quietly but firmly put an end to. Immensely gratified by this last idea—for there is nothing which so pleases us as the notion that we can gratify our own inclinations and simultaneously do our duty, possibly because the opportunities so rarely arise—Lady Muriel sought her husband, and found him busily inspecting a new rifle which had just arrived from London. After praising his purchase, and talking over a few ordinary matters, Lady Muriel said shortly :

“By the way, Alick, how much longer are we to be honoured by the company of Dr. Wilmot?”

The inquiry seemed to take Kilsyth aback,

more from the tone in which it was uttered than its purport, and he said hesitatingly,

“Dr. Wilmot! Why, my dear? He must stay as long as Madeleine—I mean—but have you any objection to his being here?”

“I! Not the least in the world; only he seems to me to be in an anomalous position. Very likely his social talents are very great, but we get no advantage of them; and as for his professional skill—for which, I suppose, he was called here—there is no longer any need of that. Madeleine is out of all danger, and is on the fair way to health.”

“You think so?”

“I’m sure of it. But, at all events, any doubt on that point could be dissipated by asking the Doctor himself.”

“My dearest Muriel, wouldn’t that be a little *brusque*, eh?”

“My dear Alick, you don’t seem to see that very probably this gentleman is wishing himself far away, but does not exactly know how to make his adieux. A man in a practice like Dr. Wilmot’s, however we may remunerate him for his visit

here, and however agreeable it may be to him" (Lady Muriel could not resist giving way in this little bit), "must lose largely while attending on us. He is a gentleman, and consequently too delicate to touch on such a point; but it is one, I think, which should be taken into consideration."

Lady Muriel had had too long experience of her husband not to know the points of his armour. The last thrust was a sure one, and went home.

"I should be very sorry," said Kilsyth, with a little additional colour in his bronzed cheeks, "to think that I was the cause of preventing Dr. Wilmot's earning more money, or advancing himself in his profession. We owe him a deep debt of gratitude for what he has done; but perhaps now, as you say, Madeleine is out of danger, and may be safely left to the care of Dr. Joyce. I'll speak to Dr. Wilmot, my dear Muriel, and make it all right on that point."

CHAPTER VII.

BROODING.

THE effect of her husband's letter on Mrs. Wilmot's mind, strengthened by the view taken of its contents by Henrietta Prendergast, was of the most serious and injurious nature. Hitherto the unhappiness which had possessed her had been negative—had been literally *unhappiness*, the absence of joy; but from the hour she read Wilmot's letter, and talked over it with her friend, all that was negative in her state of mind changed to the positive. Hitherto she had been jealous—jealous as only a woman of a thoroughly proud, sensitive, secretive, and sullen nature can be—of an abstraction. Her husband's profession was the *bête noir* of her existence, was the barrier between her and the happiness for which she vainly longed and pined. She had looked around her, and seen other



women whose husbands were also working bees in the world's great hive; but their work did not absorb them to the exclusion of home interests, and the deadening of the sweet and blessed sympathies which lent happiness all its glow, and robbed sorrow of half its gloom. Her husband had never spoken an unkind word to her in his life, had never refused her a request, or denied her a pleasure; but he had never spoken a word to her which told her that the first place in his life was hers; he had never cared to anticipate a request or to share a pleasure. To a woman like Mabel Wilmot, in whose character there was a strong though wholly unsuspected element of romance, there was an inexhaustible source of suffering in these facts, combined with her husband's proverbial devotion to his profession. Not a clever woman, thoroughly conventional in all her ideas, without a notion of the possibility of altering the routine of her life to any pattern which might take her fancy, a dreamer, and incurably shy, especially with him, who never discerned that there was anything beneath the surface of her placid, equa-



ble, rather cold manner to be understood, she had ample materials within herself for misery ; and she had always made the most of them.

An incalculable addition had been made to her store by Wilmot's letter, and Henrietta Prendergast's comments. Mabel wrote to Mr. Foljambe, under the observation and by the dictation of her friend, merely repeating the words of her husband's letter ; and during that performance, and the ensuing conversation, she had felt sufficiently black and bitter to have satisfied any fiend who might have been waiting about for the chance of gratifying his malignity by the coming to grief of human affairs. But it was when she was left alone, when her friend had gone away, and she was in her solitary room—all the trivial occupations of the day at an end, and only the long hours of the night, often sleepless hours to her, to be faced—that she gave way to the intensity of the bitterness of her spirit ; that she looked into and sounded the darkness and the depth of the gulf of sorrow which had opened before her feet.

That her husband sought and found all his



happiness in the duties of his profession ; that he had no consciousness, comprehension, or care for the disappointed feelings which occupied her wholly, had been hard enough to bear—how hard, the lonely woman who had borne the burden knew ; but such a state of things, the state from which only a few hours divided her, was happy in comparison with that which now opened suddenly before her. He had neglected her for the profession he preferred ; he was going to neglect his own interests, to depart from his accustomed law of life, to throw the best friend he had in the world over—for a woman : yes, a woman, a sick girl had done what she had failed to do : she had never swayed his judgment, or turned him aside from a purpose for a moment ; and now he was changed by the touch of a more potent hand than hers, and there was an end of the old settled melancholy peacefulness of her life ; active wretchedness had come in, and the repose, dear-bought in its deadness of disappointment and blight, was all gone.

Mabel Wilmot sat opposite the long glass in her room that night, and turned the branch-candles

so as to throw a full light upon her face, at which she gazed steadily and long, frowning as she did so. It was a fair face, and the fresh bloom of youth was still upon it. It was a face in which a skilful observer might have read strange matters; but there were none curious to read the story in the face of the pretty wife of the prosperous rising man. Her eyes were soft and dark, well shaded by long lashes, and marked by finely-arched eyebrows; and there were none to see that there was frequent gloom and brooding in their darkness—a shadow from the gloominess of the soul within. She was fair rather than pale, and had abundant dark hair; and as she sat and gazed in the glass, she let its dusky masses loose, and caught them in her hands. The fair face was not pleasant to look upon; and so she seemed to think, for she muttered:

“She is very pretty, I suppose, and a great deal younger than I am; never looks sullen, and has no cause. And yet he’s not a man I should have thought to have been beguiled by any woman. *I* never beguiled him, and I was pretty in my

time ; ay, and *new* too ! And I have lived in his sight all these years, and he has never sacrificed an hour of time or thought to me. And now he leaves me without hesitation, though I am ill. I have not talked about it, to be sure ; but what is his skill worth, if he did not see it in my face and hear it in my voice without being told ! I was not a *case*—I was only his wife ; and he never thought of looking, never thought of caring whether I was ill or well. I appear at breakfast, and I go out every day ; that's quite enough for him. I wonder if he knew what I suspect, what I should once have said *I hope*, is the cause ; but that is a long time ago. Would it have made any difference ? I don't mean now ; of course it would not *now* ; nothing makes any difference to a man when once his heart is turned aside, and quite filled by another. I don't think I ever touched his heart ; I know only too well I never filled it."

Mabel Wilmot was right. She had never filled her husband's heart. She had touched it though, for a time and after a light holiday kind of fashion, which had subsided when life began

in earnest for them, and which he had laid aside and forgotten, as a boy might have abandoned and lost sight of the toys with which he had amused himself during a school vacation. And the girl had been deceived; had built silently in the inveterately undemonstrative recesses of her heart and fancy a fairy palace, destined to stand for ever empty. It had been swept and garnished; but the prince had never come to dwell there: he with busy feet had passed by on the other side, and she had nothing to do but to sit and mourn in the empty chambers. She had borne her grief valiantly until now; she had only known the passive side of it. But that was all over for ever; and the day that dawned after Wilmot's wife had received his letter found her a different woman from what she had been.

"Are you sure you are not ill, Mabel?" asked Mrs. Prendergast the day after their colloquy over the letter. "You are so black under the eyes, and your face is so pinched, I fancy you must be ill."

"Not more so than usual," said Mrs. Wilmot shortly.

"Than usual, my dear! What *do* you mean? Have you been feeling ill lately?"

"Yes, Henrietta, very ill."

"And have you been doing nothing for yourself? Have you not had advice?"

"You know I have not. You have seen me very nearly every day, and you know I have done nothing without your knowledge."

"But Wilmot?" said Mrs. Prendergast.

"O Wilmot! Much he knows and much he cares about me! Don't talk nonsense, Henrietta. If I were dying, he would not see it while I could keep on my feet, which I certainly should do as long as I could."

"My dear Mabel," remonstrated Henrietta, "do you mean to tell me that, feeling very ill, you have actually suffered your husband to leave you? Is that right, Mabel? Is it right to yourself or fair to him?"

"Fair to *him*!" returned Mrs. Wilmot with a scornful emphasis. "The idea of anything I do being fair or unfair to *him*. I am so important to him, am I not? His life is so largely influenced

by me? Really, Henrietta, I don't understand you."

"O yes, you do," said her friend; and she seated herself beside her, and took her feverish hands firmly in hers; "you understand me perfectly. What is the illness, Mabel? How do you suffer, and why are you concealing it?"

"I suffer always, and in all ways," said Mabel, twitching her hands impatiently from her friend's grasp, and averting her face, down which tears began slowly to trickle. "I have not been well for a long time; and would not one think that *he* might have seen it? He can be full of skill and perception in everyone's case but mine."

Henrietta Prendergast was troubled. She was a woman with an odd kind of conscience. So long as a fact did not come too forcibly before her, so long as a duty did not imperatively confront her, she would ignore it; but she would not do the absolutely, the undeniably wrong, nor leave the obviously and pressingly right undone. Here was a dilemma. She believed that Wilmot's ignorance of his wife's state of health was solely

the result of her own studious avoidance of complaint, or of letting him see, during the short periods of every day that they were together, that she was suffering in any way. Any man whose perceptions were not quickened by the inspiration of love would be naturally deceived by the calm tranquillity of Mrs. Wilmot's manner, which, if occasionally sullen, was apparently influenced in that direction by trivial causes,—household annoyances, and so forth. And though Henrietta Prendergast had a grudge against Chudleigh Wilmot, which was all the stronger and the more lasting that it was utterly unreasonable, she could not turn a deaf ear to the promptings of her conscience, which told her she must speak the truth on his behalf now.

“I must say, Mabel,” she began, “that I think it is your own fault that Wilmot has not perceived your state of health. You have carefully concealed it from him, and now you are angry at your own success. You must not continue to act thus, Mabel; you will destroy his happiness and your own.”

“*His* happiness !” repeated Mrs. Wilmot with indescribable bitterness; “*his* happiness *and* mine ! I know nothing about his happiness, or what he has found it in hitherto, and may find it in for the future. I only know that it has nothing to do with mine ; and that I have no happiness, and never can have any now.”

The sullen conviction in Mabel Wilmot’s voice impressed her friend painfully, and kept her silent for a while. Then she said :

“You are unjust, Mabel. You have concealed your suffering and illness from me as effectually as from him.”

“Do you attempt to compare the cases ?” said Mrs. Wilmot with a degree of passion extremely unusual to her. “I deny that they admit of comparison. However, there is an end of the subject ; let us talk of something else. If I am not better in a day or so, I can do as Mr. Foljambe has had to do : I can call in Whittaker, or somebody else. It does not matter. Let us turn to some more agreeable topic.”

And the friends talked of something else. They

lunched together, and they went out driving; they did some very consolatory shopping, and paid a number of afternoon calls. But Henrietta Prendergast watched her friend closely and unremittingly; and came to the conclusion that she was really ill, and also that it was imperatively right her husband should be informed of the fact. Henrietta dined at Charles-street; and when the two women were alone in the evening, and the confidence-producing tea-tray had been removed, she tried to introduce the interdicted subject. Ordinarily she was anything but a timid woman, anything but likely to be turned from her purpose; but there was something new in Mabel's manner, a sad intensity and abstraction, which puzzled and distressed her, and she had never in her life felt it so hard to say the things she had determined to say.

Argument and persuasion Mrs. Wilmot took very ill; and at length her friend told her, in an accent of resolution, that she had made up her mind as to her own course of action.

“It is wrong to leave Wilmot in ignorance,

Mabel," she said; "wrong to him and wrong to you. If only a little of all you have acknowledged to me were the matter with you, it would still be wrong to conceal it from him. If you *will* not tell him, I *will*. If you will not promise me to write to him to-night, I will write to him to-morrow. Mind, Mabel, I mean what I say; and I will keep my word."

Mrs. Wilmot had been leaning, almost lying, back in a deep easy-chair, when her friend spoke. She raised herself slowly while she was speaking, her dark eyes fixed upon her, and when she had finished, caught her by the wrist.

"If you do this thing, Henrietta, I most solemnly declare to you that I will never speak to you or see you again. In this, in all that concerns my husband and myself, I claim, I insist upon perfect freedom of action. No human being—on my side at least—shall come between him and me. I am thoroughly in earnest in this, Henrietta. Now choose between him and me."

"Choose between him and *you*! What *can* you mean, Mabel?"

"I know what I mean, Henrietta, and I am determined in this. When you know all, you will see that only I can speak to him ; and that I must speak, not write."

"Then you *will* speak?"

"Yes, I will speak. I suppose he will return in a few days ; and then I will speak."

Then Mabel Wilmot told her friend intelligence which surprised her very much, and they stayed together until late ; and when they parted Mrs. Prendergast looked very thoughtful and serious.

"This will make things either better or worse," she said to herself that night. "If he returns soon, and receives the news well, all may go on well afterwards ; but if he stays away for this girl's sake much longer, I don't think even the child will do any good."

Many times within the next few days, in thinking of her friend, Mrs. Prendergast said, "There's a desperation about her that I never saw before, and that I don't like."

The days passed over, and Wilmot's patients

were obliged either to content themselves with the attendance of the insinuating Whittaker, or to exercise their own judgment and call in some other physician of their own choice. There was no doubt that the delay was injuring Wilmot. He might have had his week's holiday, and passed it with Sir Saville Rowe, and welcome; but he was not at Sir Saville's, and the week had long been over. As for Mr. Foljambe, his indignation was extreme.

"Hang it!" he observed, "if Chudleigh can't come back when he might, why does he pretend to keep up a London practice? And to send me Whittaker too; a fellow I hate like—like colchicum. I suppose I can choose my doctor for myself, can't I?"

Thus the worthy and irascible old gentleman, who was more attached to Chudleigh Wilmot than to any other living being, would discourse to droppers-in concerning his absent favourite; and as the droppers-in to the invalid room of the rich banker were numerous, and of the class to whom Wilmot was especially well known, the old gentle-

man's talk led to somewhat wide and varied speculation on the causes and inducements of his absence. Mr. Foljambe had ascertained all the particulars which Wilmot had given his wife; and Kilsyth of Kilsyth was soon a familiar phrase in connection with the rising man. Everybody knew where he was, and "all about it;" and when the unctuous and deprecating Whittaker talked of the "specially interesting case" which was detaining Wilmot, glances of unequivocal intelligence, but of somewhat equivocal meaning, were interchanged among his hearers; and guesses were made that Miss Kilsyth was a "doosed nice" girl, or her step-mother Lady Muriel,—“young enough to be Kilsyth's daughter, you know, and never lets him forget it, by Jove,”—was a “doosed fine” woman. “The Kilsyths” began to be famous among Wilmot's *clientèle* and the old banker's familiars; the *Peerage*, lying on his bookshelves, and hitherto serenely undisturbed, with its covering of dust, was frequently in demand; and young Lothbury, of Lombard, Lothbury, & Co., made quite a sensation when he informed a select

circle of Mr. Foljambe's visitors that he knew Ronald Kilsyth very well—was in his club in fact.

“Old Kilsyth's son,” he explained; “a very good fellow in his way, and quite the gentleman, as he ought to be of course, but a queer-tempered one, and a bit of a prig.”

“Have you written to your husband, Mabel?” said Mrs. Prendergast with solemn anxiety, when the third week of Wilmot's absence was drawing to a close, and his wife's illness had increased day by day, so that now it was a common topic of conversation among their acquaintance.

“No,” returned Mabel, “I have not. I have told you I will not write, but speak to him; and I am resolved.”

“But Whittaker? Surely he does not know your husband is ignorant of your state?”

“O, dear no,” returned Mrs. Wilmot, with a smile by no means pleasant to see. “He is the jolliest and simplest of men in all matters of this kind. Mrs. Whittaker wouldn't, in fact couldn't,

have a finger ache unknown to him; and he never suspects that things are different with me."

"Mabel," said her friend, "you do very, very wrong; but I will not interfere or argue with you. Only, remember, I believe much will depend on your reception of him."

"Don't be alarmed, Henrietta," said Mabel Wilmot. "I promise you, unhesitatingly, that Wilmot will not be dissatisfied with the reception he shall have from me."

CHAPTER VIII.

KITH AND KIN.

It was a good thing for Kilsyth that he had a soft, sweet, affectionate being like Madeleine on whom he could vent the fund of affection stored in his warm heart, and who could appreciate and return it. In the autumn of life, when the sad strange feeling first comes upon us, that we have seen the best of our allotted time, and that the remainder of our pilgrimage must be existence rather than life; when the ears which tingled at the faintest whisper of love know that they will never again hear the soft liquid language once so marvellously sweet to them; when the heart which bounded at the merest promptings of ambition beats with unmoved placidity even as we recognise the victories of our juniors in the race; when we see the hopes and cares and wishes

which we have so long cherished one by one losing their sap and strength and verdure, one by one losing their hold on our being, and borne whirling away, lifeless and shrivelled, on the sighing wind of time,—we need be grateful indeed if we have anything so cheering and promiseful as a daughter's affection. It is the old excitement that has given a zest to life for so many years; administered in a very mild form indeed, but still there. The boys are well enough, fine gentlemanly fellows, making their way in the world, well spoken of, well esteemed, doing credit to the parent stock, and taking—ay, there's the deuce of it!—taking the place which we have vacated, and making us feel that we have vacated it. Their mere presence in the world brings to us the consciousness which arose dimly years ago, but which is very bright and impossible to blink now,—that we no longer belong to the present, to the generation by which the levers of the world are grasped and moved; that we are tolerated gently and genially indeed, with outward respect and with a certain amount of real affection; but that we are in effect *rococo*

and bygone, and that our old-world notions are to be kindly listened to, not warmly adopted. Ulysses is all very well ; in fact, was a noted chieftain in his day, went through his wanderings with great pluck and spirit, had his adventures, dear old boy. You recollect that story about the Gräfinn von Calypso, and that scandalous story which was published in the *Ogygian Satirist* ? But it is Telemachus who is the cynosure of Ithaca nowadays, whom we watch, and on whom we wait. But with a girl it is a very different matter. To her her father—until he is supplanted by her husband—still stands on the old heroic pedestal where, through her mother's interpretation, she saw him long since in the early days of her childhood ; in her eyes “age has not withered him, nor custom staled his infinite variety ;” all his fine qualities, which she was taught to love,—and how easily she learned the lesson!—have but mellowed and improved with years. Her brothers, much as she may love them, are but faint copies of that great original ; their virtues and good qualities are but reflected lights of his—his the be-all and end-all of her ex-

istence; and the love between him and her is of the purest and most touching kind. No tinge of jealousy at being supplanted by her sullies that great love with which he regards her, and which is free from every taint of earthiness; towards her arises a chastened remembrance of the old love felt towards her mother, with the thousand softened influences which the old memories invest it with, combined with that other utterly indescribable affection of parent to child, which is one of the happiest and holiest mysteries of life.

So the love between Kilsyth and his girl was the happiness of his existence, the one gentle bond of union between him and the outer world. For so large-hearted a man, he had few intimate relations with life; looking on at it benevolently, rather than taking part even in what it had to offer of gentleness and affection. This was perhaps because he was so thoroughly what is called "old-fashioned." Lady Muriel he honoured, respected, and gloried in. On the few occasions when he was compelled to show himself in London society, he went through his duty as though en-

joying it as much as the most foppish Osric at the court; supported chiefly by the universal admiration which his wife excited, and not a little by the remembrance that another month would see him freed from all this confounded nonsense, and up to his waist in a salmon stream. There could be no terms of praise too warm for "my lady," who was in his eyes equally a miracle of talent and loveliness, to whom he always deferred in the largest as in the smallest matters of life; but it was Madeleine

"who had power

To soothe the sportsman in his softer hour."

It was Madeleine who had his deepest, fondest love—a love without alloy; pure, selfless, and eternal.

These feelings understood, it may be imagined Kilsyth had the warmest feelings of gratitude and regard towards Dr. Wilmot for having, as everyone in the house believed, and as was really the fact, saved the girl's life, partly by his skill, principally by his untiring watchfulness and devotion to her at the most critical period of her illness. In such a man as Kilsyth these feelings could not

remain long unexpressed ; so that within a couple of days of the interview between Lady Muriel and Dr. Wilmot, Kilsyth took an opportunity of meeting the doctor as he was taking his usual stretch on the terrace, and accosting him.

“ Good-morning, Dr. Wilmot ; still keeping to the terrace as strictly as though you were on parole ? ”

“ Good-morning to you. I’m a sanitarian, and get as much fresh air as I can with as little labour. This terrace seems to me the only level walking ground within eyeshot ; and there’s no more preposterous mistake than overdoing exercise. Too much muscularity and gymnastics are amongst the besetting evils of the present day, depend upon it.”

“ Very likely ; but I’m not of the present day, and therefore not likely to overdo it myself, or to tempt you into overdoing it. But still I want you to extend your constitutional this morning round to the left ; there’s a path that skirts the craig—a made path in the rock itself, merely broad enough for two of us to walk, and which

has the double advantage that it gives us peeps of some of the best scenery hereabouts ; and it is so little frequented, that it will give us every chance of uninterrupted conversation. And I want to talk to you about Madeleine."

Whatever might have been Chudleigh Wilmot's previous notions as to the pleasure derivable from an extended walk with the old gentleman, the last word decided him ; and they started off at once.

"I won't pretend to conceal from you, Dr. Wilmot," said Kilsyth, after they had proceeded some quarter of a mile, talking on indifferent subjects, and stopping now and then to admire some point in the scenery,—“I won't pretend to conceal from you, that ever since your arrival here I have had misgivings as to the manner in which you were first summoned. I—”

“Pray don't think of that, sir.”

“I don't—any more than, I am sure, you do. My Madeleine, who is dearer to me than life, was, I knew, in danger. I heard of your being in what one might almost call the vicinity from

Duncan Forbes ; and without thought or hesitation I at once telegraphed to you to come on here."

"Thereby giving me the pleasantest holiday I ever enjoyed in my life, and enabling me to start away, as I was on the point of doing, with the agreeable reflection that I have been of some comfort to some most kind and charming people."

"I am delighted to hear you say those friendly words, Dr. Wilmot ; but I am not convinced even now. So far as—as the honorarium is concerned, I hope you will allow me to make that up to you ; so that you shall have no reminder in your banker's book that you have not been in full London practice ; and as to the feeling beyond the honorarium, I can only say that you have earned my life-long gratitude, and that I should be only too glad for any manner of showing it."

Wilmot waited a minute before he said, "My dear sir, if there is anything I hate, it is conventionality ; and I am horribly afraid of being betrayed into a set speech just now. With regard to the latter part of your remarks your gratitude

for any service I may have been to you cannot be surpassed by mine for my introduction to my charming patient and your delightful family circle. With regard to what you were pleased to say about the honorarium, you must be good enough to do as I shall do—forget you ever touched upon the subject. You don't know our professional etiquette, my dear sir—that when a man is on a holiday he does no work. Nothing on earth would induce me to take a fee from you. You must look upon anything I have done as a labour of love on my part; and I should lose all the pleasure of my visit if I thought that that visit had not been paid as a friend rather than as a professional man.”

Kilsyth must have changed a great deal from his former self if these words had not touched his warm generous heart. Tears stood in his bright blue eyes as he wrung Chudleigh Wilmot's hand, and said, “You're a fine fellow, Doctor; a great fellow altogether. I'm an old man now, and may say this to you without offence. Be it as you will. God knows, no man ever left this house

carrying with him so deep a debt of its owner's gratitude as will hang round you. Now as to Madeleine. You're off, you say, and I can't gainsay your departure; for I know you've been detained here far too long for the pursuance of your own proper practice, which is awaiting you in London; and I feel certain you would not go if you felt that by your going you would expose her to any danger of a relapse. But I confess I should like to hear from your own lips just your own candid opinion about her."

Now or never, Chudleigh Wilmot! No excuse of miscomprehension! You have examined yourself, probed the inmost depths of your conscience in how many midnight vigils, in how many solitary walks! You know exactly the state of your feelings towards this young girl; and it is for you to determine whether you will renounce her for ever, or continue to tread that pleasant path of companionship—so bright and alluring in its present, so dark and hopeless in its future—along which you have recently been straying. Professional and humanitarian consi-

derations? Are you influenced by them alone, when you reply—

“My dear sir, you ask me rather a difficult question. Were I speaking of your daughter’s recovery from the disease under which she has been labouring, I should say with the utmost candour that she has so far recovered as to be comparatively well. But I should not be discharging my professional duty—above all, I should not be worthy of that trust which you have reposed in my professional skill, and of the friendship with which you have been so good as to honour me—if I disguised from you that during my constant attendance on Miss Kilsyth, and during the examinations which I have from time to time made of her system, I have discovered that—that she has another point of weakness totally disconnected from that for which I have been treating her.”

He was looking straight into the old man’s eyes as he said this—eyes which dropped at the utterance of the words, then raised themselves again, dull, heavy-lidded, with all the normal light and life extinguished in them.

“I heard something of this from Muriel, from Lady Muriel, from my wife,” muttered Kilsyth; “but I should like to know from you the exact meaning of your words. Don’t be afraid of distressing me, Doctor,” he added, after a short pause; “I have had in my time to listen to a sentence as hard—almost as hard”—his voice faltered here—“as any you could pronounce; and I have borne up against it with tolerable courage. So speak.”

“I have no hard, at least no absolute, sentence to pronounce, my dear sir; nothing that does not admit of much mitigation, properly taken and properly treated. Miss Kilsyth is not a hoyden, you know; not one of those buxom young women who, according to French notions, are to be found in every English family—”

“No, no!” interrupted the old gentleman a little querulously.

“On the contrary, Miss Kilsyth’s frame is delicate, and her constitution not particularly strong. Indeed, in the course of my investigation during her recent illness, I discovered that her

left lung was not quite so healthy as it might be."

"Her lungs! Ah, good heavens! I always feared that would be the weak spot."

"Are any of her family so predisposed?"

"One brother died of rapid consumption."

"Ay, indeed! Well, well, there's nothing of that kind to be apprehended here,—at least there are no urgent symptoms. But it is only due to you and to myself to tell you that the lungs are Miss Kilsyth's weak point, and that every care should be exercised to ward off the disease which at present, I am happy to say, is only looming in the distance."

"And what should be the first step, Dr. Wilmot?"

"Removal to a softer climate. You have a London house, I know; when do you generally make a move south?"

"Lady Muriel and the children usually go south in October,—about five weeks from hence,—and I go down to an old friend in Yorkshire for a month's cover-shooting. But this is an ex-

ceptional year, and anything you advise shall be done."

"My advice is very simple; it is, that you so far make an alteration in your usual programme as to put Miss Kilsyth into a more congenial climate at once. This air is beginning now to be moist and raw in the mornings and evenings, and at its best is now unfit for anyone with delicate lungs."

"Would London do?"

"London would be a great improvement on Kilsyth—though of course it's treason to say so."

"Then to London she shall go at once; and I hope you will allow me the pleasure of anticipating that my daughter, when there, will have the advantage of your constant supervision."

"Anything I can do for Miss Kilsyth shall be done, you may depend on it, my dear sir. And now I want to say good-bye to you, and to you alone. I have a perfect horror of adieux, and dare not face them with women. So you will make my farewell to Lady Muriel, thanking her for all the kindness and hospitality; and—and you

will tell Miss Kilsyth—that I shall hope to see her soon in London ; and—so God bless you, my dear sir, *au revoir* on the flags of Pall-Mall.”

Half an hour afterwards he was gone. He had made all his arrangements, ordered his horses, and slipped away while all the party was engaged, and almost before his absence from the luncheon-table was remarked. He knew that the road by which he would be driven was not overlooked by the dining-room where the *convives* would be assembled ; but he knew well enough that it was commanded by one particular window, and to that window he looked up with flashing eyes and beating heart. He caught a momentary glimpse of a pale face surrounded by a nimbus of golden hair ; a pale face on which was an expression of sorrowful surprise, and which, as he raised his hat, shrunk back out of sight, without having given him the smallest sign of recognition. That look haunted Chudleigh Wilmot for days and days ; and while at first it distressed him, on reflection brought him no little comfort, thinking, as he did, that had Madeleine had no interest in him, her expression

of face would have been simply conventional, and she would have nodded and bowed as to any ordinary acquaintance. So he fed his mind on that look, and on certain kindly little speeches which she had made to him from time to time during her illness; and when he wanted a more tangible reminiscence of her, he took from his pocket-book a blue ribbon with which she had knotted her hair during the earlier days of her convalescence, and which, when she fell asleep, he had picked from the ground and carefully preserved.

Bad symptoms these, Chudleigh Wilmot; very bad symptoms indeed! Bad and easily read; for there shall be no gawky lad of seventeen years of age, fresh from the country, to join your class at St. Vitus's, who, hearing them described, shall not be able to name the virulent disease from which you are suffering.

When Lady Muriel heard the result of her husband's colloquy with the Doctor, she was variously affected. She had anticipated that Chudleigh Wilmot would take the first opportunity

of making his escape from Kilsyth, where his presence was no longer professionally needed, while his patients in London were urgent for his return. Nor was she surprised when her husband told her that Dr. Wilmot had, when interrogated, declared that the air of Kilsyth was far too sharp for Madeleine in her then condition, and that it was peremptorily necessary that she should be moved south, say to London, at once. Only one remark did she make on this point: "Did Madeleine's removal to London—I mean did the selection of London spring from you, Alick, or Dr. Wilmot?"

"From me, dear—at least I asked whether London would do; and he said, at all events London would be infinitely preferable to Kilsyth; and so knowing that we should have the advantage of his taking charge of Madeleine, I thought it would be best for us to get away to Rutland-gate as soon as possible."

To which Lady Muriel replied, "You were quite right; but it will take at least a week before all our preparations will be complete for leaving this place and starting south."

Lady Muriel Kilsyth did not join any of the expeditions which were made up after luncheon that day; the rest of the company went away to roaring linns or to heather-covered mountains; walked, rode, drove; made the purple hills resound with laughter excited by London stories, and flirted with additional vigour, though perhaps without the subtlety imparted by the experience of the season. But Lady Muriel went away to her own room, and gave herself up to thought. She had great belief in the efficacy of "thinking out" anything that might be on her mind, and she resorted to the practice on this occasion. Her course was by no means clear or straightforward, but a little thorough application to the subject would soon show her the way. Let her look at it in all its bearings, and slur over no salient point. This man, this Dr. Wilmot—well, he was wondrously fascinating, that she must allow! His eyes, his earnestness of manner, his gravity, and the way in which he slid from grave to gay topics, as his face lit up, and his voice—ah, that voice, so mellow, so rich, so clear, and yet so soft,

and capable of such exquisite modulation! The remembrance of that face, only so recently known, has stopped the current of Lady Muriel's thoughts: she sits there in the low-backed chair, her chin resting on her breast, her hands clasped idly before her, her eyes vaguely looking on the fitfully flaming logs upon the hearth. Wondrously fascinating; in his mere earnestness so different from the men, young and old, amongst whom her life was passed; by whom, if thought were possible to them, it was held as something to be ashamed of, while frivolity resulting in vice ruled their lives, and frivolity garnished with slang governed their conversation. Wondrously fascinating; in the modesty with which he exercised the great talent he possessed, and the possession of which alone would have turned the head of a weaker man; in his brilliant energy and calm strength; in his unwitting superiority to all around him, and the manner in which, apparently unconsciously and without the smallest display, he took his place in the front rank, and, no matter who might be present, drew rapt atten-

tion and listening ears to himself. So much for him. Now for herself. And Lady Muriel rose from the soft snugger of her cushioned chair, and folded her arms across her breast, and began pacing the room with hurried steps. This man had established an influence over her? Agreed. What was worse, established his influence without intending it, without absolutely wishing it? Agreed again. Lady Muriel was far too clever a woman to shirk any item or gloss over any replies to her cross-examination of herself. And was she, who had hitherto steered her way through life, avoiding all the rocks and shoals and quicksands on which she had seen so much happiness wrecked, so much hope ingulfed—was she now to drift on for the same perilous voyage, without rudder or compass, without even a knowledge whether the haven would be open to her? Not she. For her husband's, for her own sake, for her own and her children's credit, she would hold the course she had held, and play the part she had played. A shudder ran through her as she pictured to herself the delight with which the thousand-and-one tongues of Lon-

don scandal would whisper and chuckle over the merest hint that their prophecy of years since was beginning to be fulfilled—how the faintest breath of suspicion with which a name could be coupled would fly over the five miles of territory where Fashion reigns. She stopped before the glass, put her hand to her heart, and saw herself pale and trembling at the mere idea.

And yet to be loved ! Only for once in her life to know that she loved and was loved again, not by a man whom she could tolerate, but by one whom she could look up to and worship. Not reverence—that was not the word ; she revered Kilsyth—but whose intellect she could respect, whose self she could worship. O, only for once in her life to experience that feeling which she had read so much about and heard so much of ; to feel that she was loved heart and soul and body ; loved with wild passion and calm devotion—for such a man as this was capable of both feelings simultaneously—loved for herself alone, independently of all advantages of state and position ; loved by the most lovable man in the world ;

Loved! the word itself was tabooed amongst the women with whom she lived, as being too strong and expressive. They 'liked' certain men in a calm, easy, *laissez-aller* kind of way at the height of their passion; then married them, with proper amount of bishop, bridesmaid, and wedding present, all duly celebrated in the fashionable journal; and then "gave up to parties what was meant for mankind." Ah, the difference between such an existence and that passed as this man's wife! cheering him in his work, taking part in his worries, lightening his difficulties, always ready with a smiling face and bright eyes to welcome him home, and—Jealous? Not she! there would be no such feeling with her in such a case. Jealous! And as the thought rose in her mind, simultaneously appeared the blue eyes and the golden hair of her step-daughter.

That must be nipped in the bud at once! There was nothing on Dr. Wilmot's part—probably there might be nothing on either side; but sentimental friendship of that kind generally had atrociously bad results; and Madeleine was a

very impressionable girl, and now, as Kilsyth had determined, was to be constantly thrown with Wilmot, to be under his charge during her stay in London, and therefore likely to have all her thoughts and actions influenced by him. Such a combination of circumstances would be necessarily hazardous, and might be fatal, if prompt measures were not taken for disposing of Madeleine previously. This could only be done by making Ramsay Caird declare himself. Why that young man had never prospered in his suit was inexplicable to Lady Muriel; he was not so good-looking as poor Stewart certainly—not one-tenth part so intense—having an excellent constitution, and looking at life through glasses of the most roseate hue; but Madeleine was young and inexperienced and docile—at least comparatively docile even to Lady Muriel, who, as she knew perfectly well, possessed very little of the girl's love; and it was through her affection that she must be touched. Who could touch her? Not her father: he was too much devoted to her to enter into the matter; at least in the proper

spirit. Who else then? Ah, Lady Muriel smiled as a happy thought passed through her mind. Ronald, Madeleine's brother,—he was the person to exercise influence in a right and proper way over his sister; and to him she would write at once.

That night the butler took two letters from the post-box in Lady Muriel's handwriting; one of them was addressed to Ramsay Caird, in George-street, Edinburgh, and ran thus:

“Kilsyth.

“MY DEAR RAMSAY,—For reasons which I have already sufficiently explained to you, you will, I think, be disposed to admit that my interest in you and your career is unquestionable, and you will be ready to take any step which I may strongly urge upon you. In this conviction, I feel sure that you will unhesitatingly adopt the suggestion which I now make, and start for London at the very earliest opportunity. You will be surprised at this recommendation, and at the manner in which I press it; but, believe me,

I do not act without much reflection, and without thorough conviction of the step I am taking, and which I am desirous you should take. I have so often talked the matter over with you, that there is no necessity for me to enter upon it now, even if there were no danger in my so doing. It will be sufficient to say that we all go to London in a week's time, and that it is specially desirable that you should be there at the same time; otherwise you may find the ground mined beneath your feet. When you arrive in town, I wish you to call upon Captain Kilsyth at Knightsbridge Barracks. You will find him particularly clear-headed, and thoroughly conversant with the ways of the world; and I should advise you to be guided by him in everything, but specially in *the* matter in question. Let me have a line to say you are on the point of starting; and believe me

“Your sincere friend,

“MURIEL KILSYTH.”

The other letter was addressed to “Captain

Kilsyth, First Life-guards, Knightsbridge Barracks, London."

"(Confidential.)

Kilsyth.

"MY DEAR RONALD,—You have heard from your father of Madeleine's illness and convalescence. She is rapidly recovering her strength, and will be her old self *physically* very shortly.

"You smile as you see that the word 'physically' is underlined; but this is not, believe me, one of those 'unmeaning women's dashes' which I have so often heard you unequivocally condemn. I underlined the word specially, because I think that Madeleine's recovery will be, so far as she is concerned, physical, and physical only.

"Not that I mean in the least that her reason has been affected, otherwise than it always is most transiently in the access of fever; but that I think that the occasion which you and I have so often talked of has come, and come in a most undeniable manner. In a word, Madeleine has lost her heart, if I am not much mistaken, and lost it in

a quarter where she herself, poor child, can hope for no return of her affection, and where, even if such return were possible, it would only bring misery on her, *and him*, and degradation to us all.

“We are coming to London at once, and therein lies simultaneously the danger to Madeleine and my hope of rescuing her from it, principally through your aid. You will see that it is impossible to enter upon this subject at length in a letter; but I could not let you be in ignorance of what I know will possess an acute and painful interest for you. Of course I have not hinted a word of this to your father, so that you will be equally reticent in any of your communications with him. You shall hear the day we expect to arrive in town, and I hope to see you in Brook-street on the next morning.

“You will recollect all I said to you about Ramsay Caird. He will probably call on you very shortly after you receive this letter. Bear in mind the cue I gave you, when we last parted, about this young man, and act up to it: he is a

little weak, a little hesitating ; but I am more convinced than ever of the advisability of pursuing the course I then indicated. God bless you !

“Your affectionate

“M. K.”

CHAPTER IX.

RONALD.

WHEN Ronald Kilsyth was little more than four years old his nurses said he was "so odd;" a phrase which stuck by him through life. As a child his oddity consisted in his curious gravity and preoccupation, his insensibility to amusement, his dislike of companionship, his love of solitude, his old-fashioned thoughts and manner and habits. He had a dogged honesty which prevented him from using the smallest deception in any way, which prevented him from ever prevaricating or telling those small fibs which are made so much of in the child, but to which he looks back as trivial sins indeed when compared with the duplicity of his after-life,—which rendered him obnoxious even to the children whom he met as playfellows in the square—

garden, and who found it impossible to get on with young Kilsyth on account of the rigidity of his morals, displeasing to them even at their tender years. When a delicious *guet-apens*, made of string stretched from tree to tree, had been, with great consumption of time and trouble, prepared for the downfall of the old gardener; and when the youthful conspirators were all laid up in ambush behind the Portugal laurels, waiting to see the old man, plodding round with rake and leaf-basket in the early dusk of the autumnal evening, fall headlong over the snare,—it was provoking to see little Ronald Kilsyth, in his gray kilt, step out and go up to the old man and show him the pitfall, and assist him in removing it. The conspirators were highly incensed at this treachery, as they called it, and would have sent Ronald then and there to Coventry,—not that that would have distressed him much,—had it not been for his magnanimity in refusing, even when under pressure, to give up the names of those in the plot. But as in this, so in everything else; and the little frequenters of the square soon found

Ronald Kilsyth "too good" for them, and were by no means anxious to secure his companionship in their sports.

At Eton, whither he was sent so soon as he arrived at the proper age, he very shortly obtained the same character. Pursuing the strict path of duty,—industrious, punctual, and regular, with very fair abilities, and scrupulously making the most of them,—he never lost an opportunity and never made a friend. All that was good of him his masters always said; but they stopped there; they never said anything that was kind. In school they could not help respecting him; out of school they would as soon have thought of making Ronald Kilsyth their companion as of taking *Hind's Algebra* for pleasant reading. And it was the same with his schoolfellows. They talked of his steadiness and of his hard-working with pride, as reflecting on themselves and the whole school. They speculated as to what he would do in the future, and how he would show that the stories that had been told about Eton were all lies, don't you know? and how Kilsyth would go up to

Cambridge, and show them what the best public school—the only school for English gentlemen, you know—could do ; and *Floreat Etona*, and all that kind of thing, old fellow. But Ronald Kilsyth, during the whole of his Eton pupilage, never had a chum—never knew what it was to share a confidence, add to a pleasure, or lighten a grief. Did he feel this? Perhaps more acutely than could have been imagined ; but being, as he was, proud, shy, sensitive, and above all queer, he took care that no one knew what his feelings were, or whether he had any at all on the subject.

Queer ! that was the word by which they called him at Eton, and which, after all, expressed his disposition better than any other. Strong-minded, clear-headed, generous, and brave, with an outer coating of pride, shyness, reserve, and a mixture of all which passed current for *hauteur*. With a strong contempt for nearly everything in which his contemporaries found pleasure,—save in the excess of exercise, as that he thoroughly understood and appreciated,—and with a weary-

ing desire to find pleasure for himself; with an impulse to exertion and work, accountable to himself only on the score of duty, but having no definite end or aim; with a restless longing to make his escape from the thralldom of conventionality, and rush off and do something somewhere far away from the haunts of men. With all the morbidness of the hero of *Locksley Hall*, without the excuse of having been jilted, and without any of the experience of that sweetly modulated cynic, Ronald Kilsyth, obeying his father's wish, and thereby again following the paths of duty, was gazetted to the Life-Guards—the exact position for a young gentleman in his condition.

The donning of a scarlet tunic instead of a round jacket, and the substitution of a helmet for a pot-hat, made very little difference in Ronald. Several of his brother officers had known him personally at Eton, so that the character he had obtained there preceded him, inspiring a wholesome awe of him before he appeared on the scene; and he had not been two days in barracks before he was voted a prig and a bore. There was

no sympathy between the dry, pedantic, rough young Scotsman and those jolly genial youths. His hard, dry, handsome clean-cut face, with its cold gray eyes, thin aquiline nose, and tight lips, cast a gloom over the cheery mess-table around which they sat; their jovial beaming smiles, and curling moustaches, and glittering shirt-studs reflected in the silver *épergne*, with its outposts of mounted sentries and its pleasant mingling of feasting and frays at the Temple of Mars and the London Tavern. His grim presence robbed many a pleasant story of its point, which indeed, in deference to him, had to be softened down or given with bated breath. The young fellows—no younger than him in years, but with, O, such an enormous gulf between them as regards the real elasticity and charm of youth—were afraid of him, and from fear sprung dislike. They had not much fear of their elders, these youths of ingenuous countenance and ingenuous modesty. They had a wholesome awe, tempering their hearty love, of Colonel Jefferson; but less on account of the strictness of his discipline

and of a certain *noli-me-tangere* expression towards those whom he did not specially favour, than on account of his age; and as for the jolly old Major, who had been in the regiment for ever so many years,—for him they had neither fear nor respect; and when he was in command—which befell him during the cheerful interval between July and December—the lads did as they liked.

But they could not get on with Ronald Kilsyth; and though they tolerated him quietly for the sake of his people, they never could be induced to regard him with anything like the fraternal good fellowship which they entertained towards each other. As it had been at Eton, so it was at Knightsbridge, at Windsor, in Albany-street, in all those charming quarters where the Household Cavalry spend their time for their own and their country's advantage. Ronald Kilsyth was respected by all, loved by none. Charley Jefferson himself, fascinated as he was by Ronald's devotion to the mysteries of drill and by all the young man's unswerving atten-

tion to his regimental duties—qualities which weighed immensely with the martinet Colonel—had been heard to confess, with a prolonged twirl at his grizzled moustache, that “Kilsyth was a d—d hard nut to crack,”—an enigmatic remark which, from so plain a speaker as the Colonel, meant volumes. The Major, whom Ronald, under strong provocation, had once designated a “tipsy old atheist,” had, in the absence of his enemy and under the influence of two-thirds of a bottle of brandy, retorted in terms which were held to justify both Ronald’s epithets; and the men had a very low opinion of him, who at the time of writing was senior lieutenant of the regiment. He had no sympathy with the men, no care for them; he would have liked to have made them more domestic, less inclined for the public-house and the music-hall; he would have subscribed to reading-rooms, to institutes, to anything for their mental improvement; but he never thought of giving them a kind word or an encouraging speech; and they much preferred Cornet Bosky—who cursed them roundly for their

talking, for their silence, for their going too fast, for their going too slow, for their anything in fact, on those horrible mornings when he happened to be in charge of them exercising their horses, but who off duty always had a kindly word, an open purse at their service—to the senior Lieutenant, who never used a bad expression, and who, as they confessed, was, after the Colonel, the best soldier in the regiment.

It was like going into a different world to leave the smoky atmosphere, the wild disorder and reckless confusion of most of the other rooms in barracks, and go into Ronald Kilsyth's trim orderly apartment. Instead of tables ringed with stains of long-since-emptied tumblers, and littered with yellow-paper-covered French novels, torn playbills, old gloves, letters, unpaid bills, opera-glasses, pipes, shreds of tobacco, heaps of cigar-ash, rolls of comic songs, trophies from knock'em-downs at race-courses, empty soda-water bottles, scattered packs of cards, and suchlike examples of free living—to find perfect order and decorum; the walls covered with movable bookcases filled with valuable books,

Raphael Morghen prints, proofs before letters after the best modern artists, and charming bits of water-colour sketches, instead of coloured daubs of French *écuyères* and *lionnes* of the Quartier Breda, photographs of Roman temple or Pompeian excavation, and Venetian glass and delicate eggshell china, and Chinese carving, and Indian beadwork. They used to look round at these things in wonder, the other young fellows of the regiment, when they penetrated into Ronald's room, and point to the pictures and ask who "that queer old party was," and depreciate the furniture by inquiring "what was that old rubbish?" They could not understand his friends either; men asked to the mess by them or seen in their rooms were generally well known in the Household Brigade, other officers in the Blues or the Foot Regiments, or idlers and dawdlers with nothing to do, men in the Treasury or Foreign Office, people whom they were safe to meet in society at least every other night in the season. But Ronald Kilsyth's guests were of a different stamp. Sometimes he brought Wrencher the novelist or Scumble the Royal Academician to dinner;

and the fellows who knew the works of both made much of the guests and did them due honour ; but when occasionally they had to receive Jack Flokes the journalist, who looked on washing as an original sin, or Dick Tinto the painter, who regarded a dirty brown velvet shooting-coat as the proper costume for the evening, or Klavierspieler the pianist, a fat dirty German in spectacles, who made a perfect Indian juggler of himself in trying to swallow his knife during dinner—they were scarcely so much gratified. Innate gentlemanliness and entire good-breeding made them receive the gentlemen with every outward sign of hospitality ; but afterwards, round the solemn council fire in the little mess-room and midst deep clouds of tobacco-smoke, they delivered a verdict anything but complimentary either to guest or host.

What possessed him ? That was what they could not understand. Nicest people in the world, sir ! father, dear delightful jolly old fellow, give you his heart's blood if you wanted it—but you don't want it, so gives the best glass of claret in London ; and at home—at Kilsyth—'gad, you

can't conceive it; no country-house to be named in the same breath with it. Perfect shooting and all that kind of thing, and thoroughly your own master, by Jove! do just as you like, I mean to say, and have everything you want, don't you know! Lady Muriel quite charming; holding her own, don't you know, with all the younger women in point of attractiveness and that sort of thing, and yet respected and looked up to, and the best mistress of a house possible. And Miss Kilsyth, Madeleine, deuced nice little girl; very pretty, and no nonsense about her; meant for some big fish! Well, yes, suppose so; but meantime extremely pleasant and chatty, and sings nice little songs and *valse*s splendidly, and all that kind of thing. That was what they said of the Kilsyth *ménage* in the Household Brigade, in which pleasant joyous assemblage of gallant freethinkers it would have been difficult to point out one who would not have been delighted at an autumn visit to Kilsyth. Ah! what we believe and that we know! The humorous articles of the comic writers, the humorous sketches of the comic artists, lead us to think that the gentlemen officers

of the regiments specially accredited for London service are, in the main, good-looking, handsome dolts, who pull their moustaches, eliminate the "r's" from their speech, and are but the nearest removes from the inmates of Hanwell Asylum. But a very small experience will serve to remove this impression, and will lead one to know that the reading and appreciation of character is nowhere more aptly read and more shrewdly hit upon than in the barrack-rooms of Knightsbridge or the Regent's Park.

People who knew, or thought they knew, Ronald Kilsyth, declared that he was solitary and oyster-like, self-contained, and caring for no one but himself. They were wrong. Ronald had strong home affections. He loved and revered his father more than any one in the world. He saw plainly enough the few shortcomings—the want of modern education, the excessive love of sport, the natural indolence of his disposition, and the intense desire to shirk all the responsibilities of his position, and to shift the discharge of them on to some one else. But equally he saw his

father's warm-heartedness, honour, and chivalry; his unselfishness, his disposition to look upon the bright side of all that happened, his cheery *bonhomie*, and his unfailing good temper. Lady Muriel he regarded with feelings of the highest respect—respect which he had often tried to turn into affection, but had tried in vain. With a woman's quickness, Lady Muriel had seen at a glance, on her first entering the Kilsyth family, that her hardest task would be to win over her stepson, and she had laid herself out for that victory with really far more care and pains than she had taken to captivate his father. With great natural shrewdness, quickened by worldly experience, Lady Muriel very shortly made herself mistress of Ronald Kilsyth's character, and laid her plans accordingly. Never was shaft more truly shot, never was mine more ingeniously laid. Ronald Kilsyth, boy as he was at the time of his father's second marriage, had scarcely had three interviews with his stepmother before she found a corroboration of the fact which had so often whispered itself in his own bosom, that he, and

he alone, was the guiding spirit of the family ; that he had knowledge and experience beyond his years ; and that if she, Lady Muriel, only got him, Ronald, to coöperate with her, everything would be smooth, and between them the felicity and well-being of all would be assured. It was a deft compliment, and it succeeded. From that time forth Ronald Kilsyth was Lady Muriel's most pliant instrument and doughtiest champion. In the circles in which during the earlier phases of his succeeding life he found himself, there were plenty to carp at his stepmother's conduct, to impugn her motives,—worst of all, to drop side hints of her integrity ; but to all of these Ronald Kilsyth gave instant and immediate battle, never allowing the smallest insinuation which reflected upon her to pass unrebuked. He thought he knew his stepmother thoroughly : whether he did or not time must show ; but at all events he thought highly enough of her to permit himself to be guided by her in some of the most important steps in his career.

And what were his feelings with regard to

Madeleine? If you wanted to find the key to Ronald Kilsyth's character, it was there that you should have looked for it. Ronald loved Madeleine with all the love which such a heart as his was capable of feeling; but he watched over her with a strictness such as no duenna ever yet dreamed of. Years ago, when they were very little children, there occurred an episode which Miss O'Grady—who was then Kilsyth's governess, and now happily married to Herr Ohm, a wine-merchant at Heidelberg—to this day narrates with the greatest delight. It was in Hamilton Gardens, where the Kilsyth children and a number of others were playing at *Les Graces*—a pleasing diversion then popular with youth—and little Lord Claud Barrington, in picking up and restoring her hoop to Madeleine, had taken advantage of the opportunity to kiss her hand. Ronald noticed the gallantry, and at once resented it, asking the youthful libertine how he dared to take such a liberty. "Well, but she liketh it!" said Lord Claud, ingenuously pointing to Madeleine, who was sucking and biting the end of her hoop-stick,

by no means ill-pleased. "Very likely," said Ronald; "but these girls know nothing of such matters. I am my sister's guardian, and call upon you to apologise." Lord Claud, humiliated, said he was "wewy thorry;" and the three,—he, Ronald, and Madeleine,—had some bath-pipe and some cough-lozenges as a banquet in honour of the reconciliation.

This odd watchfulness, never slumbering, always vigilant, perpetually unjust, and generally *exigeant*, characterised Ronald's relations with his sister up to the time of our story. When she first came out, his mental torture was extraordinary; he, so long banished from ball-rooms, accepted every invitation, and though he never danced, would invariably remain in the dancing-room, ensconced behind a pillar, lounging in a doorway, always in some position whence he could command his sister's movements, and throughout the evening never taking his eyes from her. His friends, or rather his acquaintances, who at first watched his rapt attention without having the smallest idea of its object, used to chaff him

upon his devotion, and interrogate him as to whether it was the tall person with the teeth, the stout virgin with the shells in her hair, or the interesting party with the shoulders, who had won his young affection. Ronald stood this chaff well, confident in the fact that hitherto his sister had performed her part in that grand and ludicrous mystery termed "Society," and had escaped heart-whole. He began to realise the truth of the axiom about the constant dropping of water. So long as Madeleine had had sense to comprehend, he had instilled into her the absolute necessity of consulting him before she even permitted herself to have the smallest liking for any man. During the first two months of her first season she had confessed to him twice: once in the case of a middle-aged, well-preserved peer; and again when a thin, black-bearded *attaché* of the Brazilian embassy was in question. Ronald's immediate and unmistakable veto had been sufficient in both cases; and he was flattering himself that the rest of the season had passed without any further call on his self-assumed judicial functions.

Imagine, then, his state of mind at the receipt of Lady Muriel's letter ! The assault had been made, the mine had been sprung, the enemy was in the citadel, and, worst of all, the enemy was masked and disguised, and the guardian of the fortress did not know who was his assailant, or what measures he should take to repel him !

CHAPTER X.

CROSS-EXAMINATION.

THE hall-porter at Barnes's Club in St. James's-street, whose views of life during the last two months had been remarkably gloomy and desponding, began to revive and to feel himself again as the end of October drew on apace. He had had a dull time of it, that hall-porter, during August and September, sitting in his glazed box, cutting the newspapers which no one came to read, and staring at the hat-pegs which no one used. He had his manuscript book before him, but he did not inscribe ten names in it during the day; for nearly everybody was out of town; and the few members who per force remained,—gentlemen in the Whitehall offices, or officers in the Household Brigade,—found scaffolding and ladders in the hall of Barnes's, and the morning-room in the hands of the whitewashers, and the coffee-room closed, and

the smokers relegated to the card-room, and such a general state of discomfort, that they shunned Barnes's, and went off to the other clubs to which they belonged. But with the end of October came a change. The men who had been shooting in the North, the men who had been travelling on the Continent, the men who had been yachting, and the men who had been lounging on the sea-coast, all came through town on their way to their other engagements; those who had no other engagements, and who had spent all their available money, settled down into their old way of life; all paid at least a flying visit to the club to see who was in town, and to learn any news that might be afloat.

It is a sharp bright afternoon, and the morning-room at Barnes's is so full that you might actually fancy it the season. Sir Coke Only's gray cab horse is, as usual, champing his bit just outside the door, and Lord Sumph's brougham is there, and Tommy Toshington's chestnut cob with the white face is being led up and down by the red-jacketed lad, who has probably been out of town

too, as he has not been seen since Parliament broke up, and yet is there and to the fore directly he is wanted. Tommy Toshington himself, an apple-faced little man, who might be any age between sixteen and sixty, but who is considerably nearer the latter than the former, gathers his letters from the porter as he passes, looks through them quickly, shaking his head the while at two or three written on very blue paper and addressed in very formal writing, and proceeds to the morning-room. Everybody there, everybody knowing Tommy, universal chorus of welcome from all save three old gentlemen reading evening papers, two of whom don't know Tommy, and all of whom hate him.

“And where have you come from, Tommy?” says Lord Sumph, who is a charming nobleman, labouring under the slight eccentricity of occasionally imagining that he is a steam-engine, when he whistles and shrieks and puffs, and has to be secluded from observation until the fit is over.

“Last from East Standling, my lord,” says Tommy; “and very pleasant it was.”

"Must have been doosid pleasant, by all I hear," says Sir Thomas Buffem, K.C.B., and late of the Madras army. "Dook had the gout, hadn't he? and we all know how pleasant he is then!"

"That feller was there of course—what's his name?—Bawlindor the barrister," says Sir Coke Only. "Can't bear that feller, dev'lish low-bred feller, was a dancin'-master or something of that sort—can't bear low-bred fellers;" and Sir Coke, whose paternal grandfather had been a pedlar, and who himself combined the intellect of an Esquimaux with the manners of a Whitechapel butcher on a Saturday night, cleared his throat, and thumped his stick, and looked ferocious.

"Yes, Mr. Bawlindor was there," says Tommy Toshington, looking round with a queer twinkle in his little gray eyes; "and he was very pleasant, very pleasant indeed. I hardly know how the duchess would have got on without him. He said some doosid smart things, did Mr. Bawlindor."

"I hate a feller who says smart things," said Sir Coke Only; "making a buffoon of himself."

“Ha, ha!” said Duncan Forbes, joining the group—“the carrier is jealous of the tumbler; it’s a mere question of pigeons.”

“What do you mean, Sir Duncan? I don’t understand you,” said Sir Coke angrily.

“Don’t suppose you do—never gave you credit for anything of the sort.—How are you, all you fellows? What were the smart things that Bawlindor said, Tommy?”

“Well, I don’t know; perhaps you wouldn’t think ’em smart, Duncan, because you’re a devilish clever chap yourself, and—”

“Yes, yes, we know all about that; but tell us some smart things that Bawlindor said—tell us one.”

“Well, you know Tottenham? you know he gives awful heavy dinners? He was bragging about them one day at luncheon at East Standling, and Bawlindor said, ‘There’s one thing, my lord, I always envy when I’m dining with you.’ ‘What’s that?’ says Tottenham. ‘I envy your gas,’ says Bawlindor, ‘and *it escapes*.’”

“Ye-es! that was not bad for Bawlindor. I hate the brute though; I daresay he stole it from

somebody else. Well, how are you all, and what's the news?"

"You ought to be able to tell us that," said Lord Sumph. "We're only just back in town, and you've been here all the time, haven't you, in the Tower or somewhere?"

"Not I; I'm only just back too."

"And where have you come from?"

"Last from Kilsyth."

"Devil you have!" growled Sir Thomas Buffem, edging away. "They've had jungle-fever—not jungle, scarlet-fever there, haven't they?"

"O, ah, Duncan," said Clement Walkinshaw of the Foreign Office, "tell us all about that! It was awful, wasn't it? Towcester cut and run, didn't he? Mrs. Severn said he turned pea-green, and sent such a stunning caricature of him to her sister, who was staying at Claverton! We stuck it up in the smoking-room, and had no end fun about it."

"I'm glad you were so much amused. It wasn't no end fun for Miss Kilsyth, however, as she was nearly losing her life."

“Was she, by Jove!” said Walkinshaw, who was a “beauty boy,” examining himself in the glass, and smoothing his little moustaches,—“was she, by Jove! What! our dear little Maddy?”

“Our dear little Maddy,” said Duncan Forbes calmly, “if you are on sufficient terms of intimacy with the young lady to speak of her in that manner in a public room. *I* call her Miss Kilsyth; but then we were only brought up together as children, whereas you had the advantage of having been introduced to her last season, I think, Walkinshaw.”

“That was a hot ’un for that d—d little despatch-box!” said Sir Thomas Buffem, as Walkinshaw walked off discomfited. “Serve him quite right—conceited little brute!”

“Well, but what was it, Duncan?” asked Lord Sumph. “It wasn’t only the gal, heaps of people were down with it, eh?—regular hospital, and that kind of thing? I saw the Northallertons on their way south, and the duchess said it was awfully bad up there.”

“The duchess is a — very nice person,” said

Forbes, checking himself, "and, like Sir Thomas here, an old soldier."

"But it was a great go, though, Duncan,—infection and all that, eh?" asked Captain Hetherington, who had joined the talkers. "There's no such thing as getting Poole's people to make you a coat; the whole resources of the establishment are concentrated on building a new rig-out for Towcester, who has sacrificed his entire get-up, and had his hair cut close, and taken no end of Turkish baths, for fear of being refused admittance at places where he was going to stay."

"All I can say is, then—is, that it's a capital thing for Towcester's man, or whoever gets his wardrobe," said Forbes; "Charley Jefferson might have made a good thing by buying his tunics, only there's a slight difference in their size—he wouldn't have feared the infection."

"No, not in that way perhaps," said Hetherington. "Charley's like the Yankee in Dickens's book, 'fever-proof and likewise ague;' but he *can* be got at, we all know. How about the widow? She bolted too, didn't she?"

"She did—more shame for her. No! the fact was, that at Kilsyth——"

"*Cave canem!*" said Tommy Toshington, holding up a monitory finger—" *Cave canem*, as we used to say at school. Here's Ronald Kilsyth just come into the room and making towards us!"

You can get a good view of Ronald Kilsyth now as he advances up the room. Rather under than over the middle height, with very broad shoulders betokening great muscular strength, and square limbs. His head is large, and his thick brown hair is brushed off his broad forehead, and hangs almost to his coat-collar. He has a well-moulded but rather a stern face, with bushy eyebrows, piercing gray eyes, and close thin lips. He is dressed plainly but in good taste, and his whole appearance is perfectly gentlemanlike. It would have been as hard to have mistaken Ronald for a snob as to have passed him by without notice; and there was something about him that infallibly attracted attention, and made those who saw him for the first time wonder who he was. It would have been quite impossible to

divine his profession from his appearance ; neither in look or bearing was there the smallest trace of the plunger. He might have been taken for a deep-thinking Chancery barrister, had it not been for his moustache ; or, more likely still, a shrewd long-headed engineer, a man of facts and figures and calculation ; but never a dragoon. He had been the innocent cause of extreme disappointment to many young ladies in various parts of the country where he had stayed—quiet unsophisticated girls, whose visits to London had been very rare, and who knew nothing of its society, and who hearing that a Life-Guards' officer was coming to dinner, expected to see a gigantic creature, all cuirass and jack-boots, an enlarged and ornamental edition of the sentries in front of the Horse-Guards. Ronald Kilsyth in his plain evening dress was a great blow to them ; in bygone days his moustache would have been some consolation ; but now the young farmers in the neighbourhood, the sporting surgeon, and all the volunteers wore moustaches ; and though in subsequent conversation they found Ronald very plea-

sant, he neither drawled, nor lisped, nor made love to them ; all of which proceedings they had believed to be necessary attributes of his branch of the military profession.

And many persons who were not young ladies in the country were disappointed in Ronald Kilsyth, more especially old friends of his father, who expected to find his son resembling him. Ronald inherited his father's love of honour, truth, and candour, his keen sense of right and wrong, his manliness and his courage ; but there the likeness between the men ceased. Kilsyth's warmth of heart, warmth of temper, and largeness of soul were not reflected by Ronald, who never lost his self-control, who never gave anybody credit for more than they deserved, and who—save perhaps for his sister Madeleine, and his love for her was of a very stern and Spartan character—had never entertained any particularly warm feelings for any human being.

Ronald Kilsyth is not popular at Barnes's, being decidedly an unclubbable man. The members, if ever they speak of him at all, want to

know what he joined for. He belonged to the Rag, didn't he, and some other club, where he could sit mumchance over his mutton, or stare at the lads from Aldershott drinking five-guinea Heidzeck champagne. What did he want among this sociable set? He always looked straight down his nose when Guffoon came up with a sad story, and he never cared about any scandal that was foreign. But he was not disliked, at least openly. It was considered that he was a doosid clever fellow, with a doosid sharp tongue of his own; and at Barnes's, as at other clubs, they are generally polite to fellows with doosid sharp tongues. And his father was a very good fellow, and gave very good dinners during the season; and Kilsyth was a very pleasant house to stop at in the autumn; so that, for these various reasons, Ronald Kilsyth, albeit in himself unpopular at Barnes's, was never suffered to hear of his unpopularity.

Not that if he had, it would have troubled him one jot. No man in the world was more careless of what people thought of him, so long as he had the approval of his own conscience; and by dint of

a long course of self-schooling and the presence of a certain amount of self-satisfaction, he could generally count upon that. He could not tell himself why he had joined Barnes's Club, unless it was that Duncan Forbes was a member, and had asked him to join; and he liked Duncan Forbes in his way, and wanted some place where he could be pretty certain of finding him when in town. There were few points of resemblance between Ronald Kilsyth and Duncan Forbes; but perhaps their very dissimilarity was the bond of the union, such as it was, that existed between them. Ronald knew Duncan to be weak, but believed him, and rightly, to be thorough. Duncan Forbes would assume a languid haw-hawism, an almost idiotic rapidity, a freezing *hauteur* to any one he did not know and did not care for, for the merest caprice; but he would stand or fall by a friend, and not Charley Jefferson himself would be firmer and truer under trial. Ronald knew this; and knowing it, was not disposed to be hard on his friend's less stable qualities—was rather amused indeed “by Duncan's nonsense,” as he phrased it, and showed more

inclination for his society than that of any other of his acquaintance.

The group of talkers in the window opened as Ronald approached, and he shook hands with its various members; Tommy Toshington, who always had something pleasant to say to anybody out of whom there was any possibility of his ever getting anything, complimenting him on his appearance.

“Look as fresh as paint, Ronald, my boy—fresh as paint, by Jove! Where have you been to pick up such a colour and to get yourself into such focus, eh?”

“The marine breezes of Knightsbridge have contributed to my complexion, Toshington, and the vigorous exercise of walking four miles a day on the London flags has brought me into my present splendid condition.”

“What! not been away from town at all?” asked Sir Coke Only, who would almost as soon have acknowledged his poor relations as confessed to having been in London in September.

“Not at all. In the first place, I was on duty, and could not get away; not that I think I should

have moved under any circumstances. London is always good enough for me."

"But not when it's quite empty," said Lord Sumph.

"It can't be quite empty with two millions and a half of people in it, Sumph," said Ronald.

"O, ah, cads and tradesmen, and all that sort of thing,—devilish worthy people in their way, of course; but I mean people that one knows."

"I know several of those 'devilish worthy people,' Sumph," said Ronald, with a smile; "and besides, country-house life is not much in my way."

"Don't meet those d—d radical fellows that he thinks so much of, there," growled Sir Thomas Buffem to Sir Coke Only.

"No, nor those painters and people that my boy says this chap's always bringing to mess," replied Sir Coke.

"There, he's gone away with Duncan now," said Toshington, "and they'll be happy. They're too clever, those two are, for us old fellows! Not that you're an old fellow, Sumph, my boy."

"You're old enough for several, ain't you, Tommy?" said Lord Sumph; "and I'm old enough to play you a game of billiards before dinner, and give you fifteen; so come along."

Meanwhile Ronald Kilsyth and Duncan Forbes had walked away to the far end of the room, which happened to be deserted at the time; and seating themselves on an ottoman, were soon engaged in earnest conversation.

"What on earth made you remain in town, Ronald?" asked Duncan. "I heard what you said to those fellows; but I know well enough that you could have got leave if you had wished. Why did you not come up to Kilsyth?"

"Principally because there was no particular inducement for me to do so, Duncan."

"You always were polite, Ronald—"

"Ah, you were there! No, no; you know perfectly well what I mean, Duncan. With you and the governor and Madeleine I'm always perfectly happy; and her ladyship is very friendly, and we get on very well together. But then I like you all quietly and by yourselves; I'm sel-

fish enough to want the entire enjoyment of your society. And the life at Kilsyth would not have suited me at all."

"Well, I don't know ; it was very jolly—"

"Yes, of course it was, and—By the way, Duncan, tell me all about it ; who were there, and what you did."

"O, heaps of people there—the Northallertons, and the Thurlows, and—"

"Yes, yes ; but what men—younger men, I mean?"

"Let me see : there was Towcester—"

"No, not he ; her ladyship would not have thought him objectionable, whatever I might."

"What? what the deuce are you muttering, Ronald?"

"I beg your pardon, Duncan—thinking aloud only ; it's a horrible habit I've fallen into. Well, who besides Towcester?"

"O, Severn, and Roderick Douglas, and Charley Jefferson—"

"Ah, Charley Jefferson ; he's just the same, of course?"

“O yes, he’s as jolly as ever.”

“Yes ; but I mean, is he as devoted as he was to Lady Fairfax ?”

“O, worse ; most desperate case of—no, by the way, though, I forgot ; I think he has cooled off—”

“Cooled off ! since when ?”

“Since your sister’s illness.”

“Since my sister’s illness ! What, what could that have to do with them ?”

“Well, you see, some of the people in the house got frightened at the notion of infection and that kind of thing, and bolted off. Lady Fairfax was one of the first to rush away ; and Charley, who is loyalty itself in everything, as you know, was deucedly annoyed about it. My lady had been leading him a pretty dance for a few days previously, playing off little Towcester against him, and—”

“Ah, yes. No doubt Charley was right, quite right. And that was all about him, eh ? And so the people were frightened at poor Madeleine’s illness, were they ?”

“Gad, they were, and not without reason too.

The poor child was awfully bad ; and indeed, if it had not been for Wilmot, I much doubt whether she would have pulled through."

"Hadn't been for Wilmot? Wilmot! O, yes, the London doctor who was staying somewhere near, and who was telegraphed for. Tell me about Dr. Wilmot—a clever man, isn't he?"

"Clever! He's wonderful! Keen, clear-headed fellow; sees his way through a brick wall in a minute. Not that at Kilsyth he did not do as much by his devotion to his patient as by his skill."

"Devotion? O, he was devoted to his patient, eh?" said Ronald, biting his nails.

"Never saw such a thing in all your life. Went in a regular perisher," said Duncan Forbes, dropping his hands to emphasise his words. "Put himself in regular quarantine; cut himself off from all communication with anybody else, and shut himself up in the room with his patient for days together. It's the sort of thing you read of in poems, and that kind of thing, don't you know, but very seldom meet with in real life. If Wilmot

had been a young man, and your sister had had any chance of making him like her, I should have said, it was a case of smite. But Wilmot is an old married man ; and these doctors don't indulge much in being captivated, specially by patients in fevers, I should think !”

“No ; of course not, of course not. Now, this Wilmot—what's he like ?”

“Well, he's rather a striking-looking man ; looks very earnest, and speaks with a very effectively modulated voice.”

“Ah ! And he's gentlemanly, eh ?”

“O, perfectly gentlemanly. No mistake in that.”

“And he was wonderfully devoted to Madeleine, eh ? Very kind of him, I'm sure. Shut himself up in her room, and—What did Lady Muriel think of him, by the way ?”

“I scarcely know. I never heard her say ; and yet I gathered somehow that Lady Muriel was not so much impressed in the doctor's favour as the rest of us.”

“That's curious, for there are few keener

readers of character than Lady Muriel. And the doctor was not a favourite of hers?"

"Well, no; I should say not. But the rest of the party were so strongly in his favour that we looked with some suspicion on all who did not shout as loudly as ourselves."

"And Madeleine, was she equally enthusiastic?"

"Poor Miss Kilsyth, she was not well enough to have much enthusiasm on any subject, even on her doctor. Gratitude is, I imagine, the strongest sentiment one is capable of after a long and severe illness."

"Exactly—yes—I should suppose so. And what aged man is Dr. Wilmot?"

"O, what we should have called some years ago very old, but what we now look upon as the commencement of middle age—just approaching forty, I should think."

"He is married, you say?"

"Yes; so we all understood. O yes, I heard him once mention his wife to Lady Muriel.—I say, Ronald, what an unconscionable lot of ques-

tions you are asking about Wilmot; one would think that—”

“Gentleman waiting to speak to you, sir,” said a servant, handing a card to Ronald; “says he won’t detain you a moment, sir.”

Ronald took the card, and read on it “DR. WILMOT.”

“I will come to the gentleman at once,” said he; and the servant went away.

“Who is it? Anyone I know?” asked Duncan Forbes.

“He is a stranger to me,” said Ronald, blinking the question.

He found Dr. Wilmot in that wretched little waiting-room about the size of a warm bath, and having for its furniture a chair, a table, and a map of England, which is dedicated at Barnes’s to the reception of “strangers.” The gas was low, and the Doctor was heavily wrapped up, and had a shawl round the lower part of his face; but Ronald made him out to be a gentlemanly-looking man, and specially noticed his keen flashing eyes.

The Doctor was sorry to disturb Captain Kilsyth, but his father had sent up to him just before he started a parcel which he wished delivered personally to the Captain; so he had brought it on his way from the Great Northern, by which he had just arrived. It was some law-deed, about the safety of which Kilsyth was a little particular. It would have been delivered two days since, but, passing through Edinburgh, the Doctor had found his old friend Sir Saville Rowe staying at the same hotel, and had suffered himself to be persuaded to accompany him to see the new experiments in anæsthetics which Simpson had just made, and which— Ah! but the Captain did not care for medical details. The Captain was very sorry that he had not a better room to ask the Doctor into; but the regulations at Barnes's about strangers were antediluvian and absurd. He should take an early opportunity of thanking Dr. Wilmot for his exceeding kindness in going to Kilsyth, and for the skill and attention which he had bestowed on Miss Kilsyth. The Doctor apparently to Ronald, even in the dull gas-light, with a

heightened colour disclaimed everything, asserting that he had merely done his duty. Exchange of bows and of very cold hand-shakes, the Doctor jumping into the cab at the door, Ronald turning back into the hall, muttering, "That's the man ! Taking what Duncan Forbes said, and that fellow's look when I named Madeleine—taking them together, that's the man that Lady Muriel meant. That's the man, for a thousand pounds !"

In the cab Dr. Wilmot is thinking about Ronald. A blunt rough customer rather, but with a wonderful look of his sister about him ; not traceable to any feature in particular, but in the general expression. His sister !—now a memory and a dream—with the bit of blue ribbon as the sole tangible reminiscence of her. She is among her friends now ; and probably at this moment some one is sitting close by her, close as he used to sit, and he is forgotten already, or but thought of as—Not a pleasant manner, Captain Kilsyth's. Studiously polite, no doubt, but with an undercurrent of badly-veiled suspicion and reserve. What could that mean ? Dr. Wilmot knew that his

conduct towards the Kilsyth family, so far at least as its outward expression was concerned, had merited nothing but gratitude from every member of it. Why, then, was the young man embarrassed and suspicious? Could he—pshaw! how could he by any possible means have become aware of the Doctor's secret feelings towards Miss Kilsyth—feelings so secret that they had never been breathed in words to mortal? Perfectly absurd! It is conscience that makes cowards of us all; and the Doctor decides that it is conscience which has made him pervert Captain Kilsyth's naturally cold manner so ridiculously.

Well, it is all over now! He is just back again at his old life, and he must give up the day-dreams of the past month and fall back into his professional habits. Looking out of the cab window at the long monotonous row of dirty-brown houses, at the sloppy street, at the pushing crowds on the foot-pavement, listening to the never-ceasing roar of wheels, he can hardly believe that he has only just returned from mountain, and heather, and distance, and fresh air, and comparative soli-

tude ! Back again ! The reception at home from "ten till one," the old ladies' pulses and the old gentlemen's tongues, the wearied listening to the symptoms, the stethoscopical examination and the prescription-writing ; then the afternoon visits, with the repetition of all the morning's details ; the hospital lecture ; the dull cold formal dinner with Mabel ; and the evening's reading and writing,—without one bright spot in the entire daily round, without one cheering hope, one—

A smell of tan !—the street in front of his door strewn with tan ! Some one ill close by. What is this strange sickness that comes over him—this sinking at his heart—this clamminess of his brow and hands ? The cab has scarcely stopped before he has jumped out, and has knocked at the door. Not his usual sharp decisive knock, but feebly and hesitatingly. He notices this himself, and is wondering about it, when the door opens, and his servant, always solemn, but now preternaturally grave, appears.

"Glad to see you at last, sir," says the man, "though you're too late!"

"Too late!" echoes Wilmot vacantly; "too late!—what for?"

"For God's sake, sir," says the man, startled out of his ordinary quietude; "you got the telegram?"

"Telegram! no—what telegram? What did it say? What has happened?"

"Mrs. Wilmot, sir!—she's gone, sir!—died yesterday morning at eight o'clock!"

CHAPTER XL

IRREPARABLE.

CHUDLEIGH WILMOT was a strong man, and he possessed much of the pride and reticence which ordinarily accompany strength of character. Hitherto he can hardly be said to have suffered much in his life. Affliction had come to him, as it comes to every man born of woman; but it had come in the ordinary course of human life, unattended by exceptional circumstances, above all not intensified, not warped from its wholesome purposes by self-reproach. His life had been commonplace in its joys and in its griefs alike, and he had never suffered from any cause which was

not as palpable, as apparent, to all who knew him as to himself. His had been the sorrows, chiefly his parents' death, which are rather gravely acknowledged and respected, than whispered about in corners with dubious head-shaking and suggestive shoulder-shrugging. So far the experience of the rising man had in it nothing distinctive, nothing peculiarly painful.

But there was an end of this now. A new phase of life had begun for Chudleigh Wilmot, when he recoiled, like one who has received a deadly thrust, and whose life-blood rushes forth in answer to it, from the announcement made to him by his servant. He realised the truth of the man's statement as the words passed his lips; he was not a man whose brain was ever slow to take any impression, and he knew in an instant and thoroughly understood that his wife was dead. A very few minutes more sufficed to show him all that was implied by that tremendous truth. His wife was dead; not of a sudden illness assailing the fortress of life and carrying it by one blow, but of an illness that had had time in which to

do its deadly work. His wife was dead ; had died alone, in the care of hirelings, while he had been away in attendance upon a stranger, one out of his own sphere, not even a regular patient, one for whom he had already neglected pressing duties—not so sacred indeed as that which he could now never fulfil or recall, but binding enough to have brought severe reflections upon him for their neglect. The thought of all this surged up within him, and overwhelmed him in a sea of trouble, while yet his face had not subsided from the look of horror with which he had heard his servant's awful announcement.

He turned abruptly into his consulting-room and shut the door between him and the man, who had attempted to follow him, but who now turned his attention to dismissing the cab and getting in his master's luggage, during which process he informed cabby of the state of affairs.

“I thought there were something up,” remarked that individual, “when I see the two-pair front with the windows open and the blinds down, and all the house shut up ; but *he* didn't

notice it." An observation which the servant commented upon later, and drew certain conclusions from, considerably nearer the truth than Wilmot would have liked, had he had heart or leisure for any minor considerations. Presently Wilmot called the man ; who entered the consulting-room, and found his master almost as pale as the corpse upstairs in "the two-pair front," where the windows were open and the blinds were down, but perfectly calm and quiet.

"Is there a nurse in the house?"

"Yes, sir ; a nurse has been here since this day week, sir."

"Send her here — stay — has Dr. Whittaker been here to-day?"

"No, sir ; he were here last night, a half an hour after my missus departed, sir ; but he ain't been here since. He said he would come at one, sir, to see your answer to the telegraft, sir."

"Very well ; send the nurse to me ;" and Wilmot strode towards the darkened window, and leaned against the wire-blind which covered the

lower compartment. He had not to wait long. Presently the man returned.

“If you please, sir, the nurse has gone home to fetch some clothes, and Susan is a-watchin’ the body.”

Chudleigh Wilmot started, and ground his teeth. It was perfectly true; the proper phrase had been used by this poor churl, who had no notion of fine susceptibilities and no intention of wounding them, who would not have remained away from his own wife if she had been ill, not to say dying, for the highest wages and the best perquisites to be had in any house in London, but to whom a corpse was a corpse, and that was all about it. The phrase did not make the dreadful truth a bit more dreadful or more true, but it made Wilmot wince and quiver.

“Is there no one else—upstairs?” he asked.

“No, sir. Mrs. Prendergast were here all night, sir, and she is coming again to meet Dr. Whittaker; but there’s no one but Susan a-watchin’ now, sir. We was waiting for orders from you.”

Wilmot turned away from the man, and spoke without permitting him to see his face.

“Tell Susan to leave the room, if you please ; I am going upstairs.”

The man went away, and returned in a few minutes with a key, which he laid upon the table, and then silently withdrew. His master was still standing by the window, his face turned away. A considerable interval elapsed before the silent group of listeners, comprising all the servants of the establishment, upon the kitchen-stairs, heard the widower's slow and heavy step ascending the front staircase.

The sight which Chudleigh Wilmot had to see, the strife of feeling which he had to encounter, were none the less terrible to him that death was familiar to him in every shape, in every preliminary of anguish and fear, in all that distorts its repose and renders its features terrible. It is an error surely to suppose that the familiarity of the physician with suffering and death, with all the ills that render the pilgrimage of life burdensome and the earthy vesture repulsive, makes the expe-

rience of these things when brought home to him easier to bear. The sickness that defies his skill, the life that eludes his grasp, is as dark an enigma, as terrible a defeat to him as to the man who knows nothing about the dissolving frame but that it holds the being he loves and is doomed to lose.

If Chudleigh Wilmot had had a deadly, vindictive, and relentless enemy,—one of those creatures of romance, but incredible in real life, who gloat over the misery of a hated object, and would increase it by every fiendish device within their ingenuity and power,—that fabulous being might have been satisfied with the mental torture which he endured when he found himself within the room, so formally arranged, so faultlessly orderly, so terribly suggestive of the cessation of life, in which his dead wife lay. As he turned the key in the lock, for the first time a sense of unreality, of impossibility came over him, with a swift bewildering remembrance—rather a vision than a recollection—of the last time he had seen her. He saw her standing in the hall, in the low light of

the autumn evening, her pretty fresh dinner-dress lifted daintily out of the way of the servant carrying his portmanteau to the cab; her head, with its coronet of dark hair, held up to receive her husband's careless kiss, as he followed the man to the door. He remembered how carelessly he had kissed her, and how—he had never thought of it before—she had not returned the caress. When had she kissed him last? This was a trifling thing, that he had never thought about till now—a question he could not answer, and had never asked till now; and in another moment he would be looking at her dead face!

The window-blinds fluttered in the faint autumn wind as Wilmot opened the door, then quickly closed and locked it; and the rustling sound added to the impressiveness of the great human silence. The hands of the stern woman who loved her had ordered all the surroundings of the dead tenderly and gracefully; and the tranquil form lay in its deep rest very fair and solemn, and not terrible to look upon, if that can ever be said of death, in its garments of

linen and lace. The head was a little bent, the face turned gently to one side, and the long dark eyelashes lay on the cheek, which was hardly at all sunken, as if they might be lifted up again and the light of life seen under them. Death was indeed there, but the sign and the seal were not impressed upon the face yet for a little while. Wilmot looked upon the dead tearless and still for some minutes, and then a quick short shudder ran through him, and he replaced the covering which had concealed the features, and sat down by the bedside, hiding his face with his hands.

Who could put on paper the thoughts that swept over him then, and swept his mind away in their turmoil, and tossed him to and fro in a tempest of anguish which even the majestic tranquillity of death in presence was powerless to quell? Who could measure the punishment, the tremendous retribution of those hours, in which, if the world could have known anything about them, the world would have seen only the natural, the praiseworthy grief of bereavement? Who shall say through what purifying fires of

self-knowledge and self-abasement the nature of the erring man passed in that dreadful vigil? And yet he did not know the truth. His conscience had been rudely awakened, but his comprehension had not yet been enlightened. He did not yet know the terrible depths of meaning which he had still to explore in the words which were the only articulate sounds that had formed themselves amid the chaos of his grief—"Too late; too late!" The failure in duty, the poverty, the niggardliness in love, the negligence, the dallying with right, in so far as his wife had been concerned, were all there, keeping him ghastly company, as he sat by the side of the dead; but the grimmest and the ghastliest phantoms which were to swarm around him were not yet evoked.

To do Chudleigh Wilmot justice, he had no notion that his wife had been unhappy. That he had never rightly understood her character or read her heart, was the soundest proof that he had not loved her; but he had never taken himself to task on that point, and had been quite

satisfied to impute such symptoms of discontent as he could not fail to notice to her sullenness of temper, of which he considered himself wonderfully tolerant. So little did this wise, rising man understand women, that he actually believed that indifference to his wife's moods was a good-humoured sort of kindness she could not fail to appreciate. She had appreciated it only too truly. The source of much of the remorse and self-condemnation which tortured him now was to be traced to his own newly-awakened feelings, to the fresh and novel susceptibility which the experience of the past few weeks had aroused, and in which lay the germs of some terrible lessons for the man whose studies in all but the lore of the human heart had been so deep, whose knowledge of that had been so strangely shallow. And now no knowledge could avail. The harm, the wrong, the cruel ill that had been done, was gone before him to the judgment; and he must live to learn its extent, to feel its bitterness with every day of life, which could never avail to lessen or repair it. .

When Dr. Whittaker arrived, he found Wilmot in his consulting-room, quite calm and steady, and prepared to receive his professional account of the "melancholy occurrence," on which he consoled with the bereaved husband after the most approved models. He did not attempt to disguise from Wilmot that he had been disagreeably surprised by his non-return under the circumstances. "Also," he added, "by your not sending me any instructions; though indeed at that stage nothing could have availed, I am convinced."

Wilmot received these observations with such unmistakable surprise that an explanation ensued, which elicited the fact that he had never received any letter from Dr. Whittaker, and indeed had had no intimation of his wife's illness, beyond that conveyed in a letter from herself a fortnight previous to her death, and in which she treated it as quite a trifling matter.

"Very extraordinary indeed," said Dr. Whittaker in a dry and unsatisfactory tone. "I can only repeat that I sent you the fullest possible

report, and entreated you to return at once. I was particularly anxious, as Mrs. Wilmot confessed to me that you were unaware of her situation."

"I never had the letter," said Wilmot; "I never heard of or from you, beyond the memoranda enclosed in my wife's letters."

"Very extraordinary," repeated Dr. Whitaker still more drily than before. "She took the letter at her own particular request, saying she would direct it, that the sight of her handwriting on the envelope, she being unable to write more, might reassure you."

Wilmot coloured deeply and angrily under his brother physician's searching gaze. He had not looked for his wife's infrequent letters with any anxiety; he had had no quick, love-inspired apprehension to be assuaged by her womanly considerateness. He felt an uneasy sort of gladness that she had thought he had had such apprehension—better so, even now, when all mistakes were doomed to be everlasting,—or when they were quite cleared up. Which was it? He

did not know; he did not like to think. All was over; all was too late.

“I never received any such letter,” he said again; “and I am astonished you did not write again when you got no answer.”

“I did not write again, because Mrs. Wilmot gave me so very decidedly to understand that you had told her you could not, under any circumstances, leave Kilsyth; and danger was not imminent until Monday, when I telegraphed, just too late to catch you.”

No more was said upon the point; but on Wilmot's mind was left a painful and disagreeable impression that Dr. Whittaker had received his explanation with distrust. The colloquy between the two physicians lasted long; and Wilmot was further engaged for a long time in giving the necessary attention to the distressing details which claim a hearing just at the time when they most disturb and jar with the tone of feeling. A sense of shock and hurry—a difficulty of realising the event which had occurred, quite other than the stunned feeling of conviction which had come

with the first reception of the intelligence—beset him, while the nameless evidences of death were constantly pressed upon his attention. He sat in his consulting-room, receiving messages and communications of every kind, hearing the subdued voices of the servants as they replied to inquiries, feeling as though he were living through a terrible feverish dream, conscious of all around him, and yet strangely, awfully conscious too of the dead white face upstairs growing, as he knew, more stiff and stark and awful as the hours, so crowded yet so lonely, so busy yet so dreary, flew, no, dragged—which was it?—along.

Many times that day, as Chudleigh Wilmot sat cold and grave, and, although deeply sad, more composed, more like himself than most men would have been in similar circumstances—a vision rose before his mind. It was a vision such as has come to many a mourner—a vision of *what might have been*. For it was not only his wife's death that the new-made widower had learned that day; he had learned that which had made her death doubly sad, far more untimely.

The vision that Chudleigh saw in his day-dream was of a fair young mother and her child, a happy wife in the summer-time of her beauty and her pride of motherhood—this was what might have been. What was, was a dead white face upstairs upon the bed, waiting for the coffin and the grave, and a blighted hope, a promise never to be fulfilled, which had never even been whispered between the living and the dead.

Mrs. Prendergast had been in the darkened house for many hours of that long day. Wilmot knew she was there; but she had sent him no message, and he had made no attempt to see her. He shrank from seeing her; and yet he wished to know all that she, and she alone, could tell him. If he had ever loved his wife sufficiently to be jealous of any other sharing or even usurping her confidence, to have resented that any other should have a more intimate knowledge of Mabel's sentiments and tastes, should have occupied her time and her attention more fully than he, Henrietta Prendergast's intimacy with her might have eli-

cited such feeling. But Chudleigh Wilmot had not loved his wife enough for jealousy of the nobler, and was too much of a gentleman for jealousy of the baser kind. No such insidious element of ill ever had a place in his nature; and, except that he did not like Mrs. Prendergast, whom he considered a clever woman of a type more objectionable than common—and Wilmot was not an admirer of clever women generally—he never resented, or indeed noticed, the exceptional place she occupied among the number of his wife's friends. But there was something lurking in his thoughts to-day; there was some unfaced, some unquestioned misery at work within him, something beyond the tremendous shock he had received, the deep-natural grief and calamity which enshrouded him, that made him shrink from seeing Henrietta until he should have had more time to get accustomed to the truth.

When the night had fallen, he heard the light tread of women's feet in the hall and a gentle whispering. Then the street-door was softly shut, and carriage-wheels rolled away. The gas had

been lighted in Wilmot's room, but he had turned it almost out, and was sitting in the dim light, when a knock at the door aroused his attention. The intruder was the "Susan" already mentioned. Mrs. Wilmot had not boasted an "own maid ;" but this girl, one of the housemaids, had been in fact her personal attendant. She came timidly towards her master, her eyes red and her face pale with grief and watching.

"Well, what is it now?" said Wilmot impatiently. He was weary of disturbance ; he wanted to be securely alone, and to think it out.

"Mrs. Prendergast desired me to give you this, sir," the girl replied, handing him a small packet, "and to say she wants to see you, sir, to-morrow—respecting some messages from missus."

He took the parcel from her, and Susan left the room. Before she reached the stairs, her master called her back.

"Susan," he said, "where's the seal-ring your mistress always wore? This parcel contains her keys and her wedding-ring ; where is the seal-ring? Has it been left on her hand?"

“No, sir,” said Susan; “and I can’t think where it can have got to. Missus hasn’t wore it, sir, not this fortnight; and I have looked everywhere for it. You’ll find all her things quite right, sir, except that ring; and Mrs. Prendergast, she knows nothing about it neither; for I called her my own self to take off missus’s wedding-ring, as it was missus’s own wish as she should do it, and she missed the seal-ring there and then, sir, and couldn’t account for it no more than me.”

“Very well, Susan, it can’t be helped,” replied Wilmot; and Susan again left him.

He sat long, looking at the golden circlet as it lay in the broad palm of his hand. It had never meant so much to him before; and even yet he was far from knowing all it had meant to her from whose dead hand it had been taken. At last, and with some difficulty, he placed the ring upon the little finger of his left hand, saying as he did so, “I must find the other, and always wear them both.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE LEADEN SEAL.

WHEN Chudleigh Wilmot arose on the following morning, with the semi-stupefied feeling of a man on whom a great calamity has just fallen, not the least painful portion of the task, not the least difficult part of the endurance that lay before him was the inevitable interview with his dead wife's friend. Mrs. Prendergast had requested that he would receive her early. This he learned from the servant who answered his bell; and he had directed that she should be admitted as soon as she arrived. He loitered about his room; he dallied with the time; he dared not face the cold silent house, the servants, who looked at him with natural curiosity, and, as he thought, avoidance. If the case had not been his own, Wilmot would have remembered that the spectacle of a new-made widow or

widower always has attractions for the curiosity of the vulgar : strong, if the grief in the case be very violent, and stronger, if it be mild or non-existent. Wilmot was awfully shocked by his wife's death, terribly remorseful for his own absence, and perhaps for another reason—at which, however, he had not yet had the hardihood to look—almost stunned by the terrible sense, the conviction of the irrevocable ill of the past, the utterly irreparable nature of the wrong that had been done. But all these warring feelings did not constitute grief. Its supreme agony, its utter sadness, its unspeakable weariness were wanting in the strife which shook and rent him. The thought of the dead face had terror and regret for him ; but not the dreadful yearning of separation, not the mysterious wrenching asunder of body and spirit, almost as powerful as that of death itself, which comes with the sentence of parting, which makes the possibility of living on so incomprehensible and so cruel to the true mourner. Not the fact itself, so much as the attendant circumstances, caused Wilmot to suffer, as he undoubtedly did



suffer. He knew in his heart that had there been no self-reproach involved in this calamity, he would not have felt it as he felt it now; and in the knowledge there was denial of the reality of grief.

No such thought as "How am I to live without her?" the natural utterance of bereavement, arose in Wilmot's heart; though neither did he profane his wife's memory or do dishonour to his own higher nature by even the most passing reference to the object which had so fatally engrossed him. The strong hand of death had curbed that passion for the present, and his thoughts turned to Kilsyth only with remorse and regret. But the wife who had had no absorbing share in his life could not by her death make a blank in it of wide extent or long duration.

He was still lingering in his room, when he was told that Mrs. Prendergast had arrived and was in the drawing-room. The closely-drawn blinds rendered the room so dark that he could not distinguish Henrietta's features, still further obscured by a heavy black veil. She did not rise,

and she made no attempt to take his hand, which he extended to her in silence, the result of agitation. She bowed to him formally, and was the first to speak. Her voice was low and her words were hurried, though she tried hard to be calm.

“I was with your wife during her illness and at her death, Dr. Wilmot,” she said; “and I am here now not to offer you ill-timed condolences, but to fulfil a trust.”

Her tone surprised Wilmot, and affected him disagreeably. There had never been any disagreement between himself and Mrs. Prendergast; he was not a man likely to interfere or quarrel with his wife's friends; and as he was wholly unconscious of the projects she had entertained towards him, he had not any suspicion of hidden malice on her part. Emotion he was prepared for—would indeed have welcomed; he was ready also for blame and reproaches, in which he would have joined heartily, against himself; but the calm, cold, rooted anger in this woman's voice he was not prepared for. If such a thing had been possible—the thought flashed lightning-like across

his mind before she had concluded her sentence—he might have had in her an enemy, biding her time, and now at length finding it.

He did not speak, and she continued :

“I presume you have heard from Dr. Whittaker the particulars of Mabel’s illness, its cause, and the means used to avert—what has not been averted?—”

“I have,” briefly replied the listener.

“Then I need not enter into that—beyond this: a portion of my trust is to tell you that Dr. Whittaker is not to blame.”

“I have not blamed him, Mrs. Prendergast.”

“That is well. When Mabel knew, or thought, I fear hoped, that her life was in danger, her strongest desire was that you should be kept in ignorance of the fact.”

“Good God! why?” exclaimed Wilmot.

“I think you must know why better than I can tell you,” replied Henrietta pitilessly. “But, at all events, such was the case. Dr. Whittaker wrote to you, but she suppressed the letter. She gave it to me on the night she died. Here it is.”

Chudleigh Wilmot took the letter from her hand silently. Astonishment and distress overwhelmed him.

“She bade me tell you that she laid her life down gladly; that she had nothing to leave, nothing to regret; that she was glad she had succeeded in keeping you in ignorance of her danger—for she knew, for the sake of your reputation, you would have left even Miss Kilsyth to be here at her death. But she preferred your absence; she distinctly bade me tell you so. She left no dying charge to you but this, that you should allow me to see her coffin closed on the second day after her death, and that you should wear her wedding-ring. I sent it to you last night, Dr. Wilmot. I hope you got it safely.”

“I did; it is here on my finger,” answered Wilmot; “but, for God’s sake, Mrs. Prendergast, tell me what all this means. Why did my wife charge you with such a message for me; how have I deserved it? Why did she, how should she, so young, and to all appearance not unhappy, wish to die, and to die in my absence? Did she perse-

vere in that wish, or was it only a whim of her illness, which, had there been any one to remonstrate with her, would have yielded later?"

"It was no whim, Dr. Wilmot. A wretched truth, I grant you, but a truth, and persisted in. So long as consciousness remained, she never changed in that."

A dark and angry look came into Wilmot's face, and he raised his voice as he asked the next question:

"Do you mean to explain this extraordinary circumstance, Mrs. Prendergast? Are you going to give me the clue to this mystery? My wife and I always lived on good terms; we parted on the same. No man or woman living can say with truth that I ever was unkind to her, or that she had cause given her *by me* to wish her life at an end, to welcome death. I believe the communication you have just made to me is utterly without example. I never heard, I don't believe anyone ever heard of such a thing. I ask you to explain it, if you can."

"You speak as though you asked, or desired

me to *account* for it too," said Henrietta in a cold and cutting tone, which rebuked the vehemence of his manner, and revealed the intense, unsleeping egotism of her disposition. "I could do so, I daresay; but I cannot see the profitableness of such a discussion between you and me. It is too late now; nothing can undo the wrong, no matter what it was, or how far it extended. It is all over, and I have nothing more to do than to carry out the last wishes of my dear friend. Have I your permission to do 'so?'" she asked, in the most formal possible tone, as she rose and stood opposite him.

Wilmot put his hands up to his face, and walked hurriedly about the room. Then he came suddenly towards Henrietta, and said with intense feeling:

"I beg your pardon; I did not mean to speak roughly: but I am bewildered by all this. I am sure you must feel for me; you must understand how utterly I am unable to comprehend what has occurred. To come home and receive such a shock as the news of my wife's death, was surely

enough in itself to try me severely. And now to hear what you tell me, and tell me too so calmly, as if you did not understand what it means, and what it must be to me to hear it! You were with her, her chosen friend. I think you knew her better than anyone in the world."

"And if I did," said Henrietta, —all her assumed calm gone, and her manner now as vehement as his own,—"if I did, is not that an answer to all you ask me? If I am to explain her motives, to lay bare her thoughts, to tell her sorrows, *to you*, her husband, is *that* not your answer? Surely you have it in that fact! They are not true husband and true wife who have closer friends. You never loved her, and you never knew or cared what her life was; and so, when she was leaving it, she kept you aloof from her."

Wilmot made no sound in reply. He stood quite still, and looked at her. His eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, and she had raised her veil. He could see her face now. Her pale cheeks, paler than usual in her grief and passion, her deep angry sorrowful eyes, and her

trembling lips, made her look almost terrible, as she stood there and told him out the truth.

“No,” she went on, “you did not know her, and you were satisfied not to know her ; you went complacently on your way, and never thought whether hers was lonely and wearisome. You never were unkind to her, you say ; no, I daresay you never were. She had all the advantages to which your wife was entitled, and she did you and them due honour. Why, even I, who did, as you say, know her best, had suspected only recently, and learned fully only since her illness began, all she suffered ; no, not all—*that* one heart can never pour into another—but I have only read the story of her life lately, and you have never read it at all. You were a physician, and you did not see that your own wife, a dweller under your own roof, whose life was lived in your sight, had a mortal disease.”

“What do you mean ?” he said ; “she had no such thing.”

“*She had !*” Henrietta repeated impetuously ; “she had a broken heart. You never ill-treated

her—true ; you never neglected her—true,—until she was dying, that is to say ;—but did you ever love her, Dr. Wilmot ? Did you ever consider her as other or more than an appendage of your position, an ornament in your house, a condition of your social success and respectability ? What were her thoughts, her hopes, her disappointments to you ? Did you ever make her your real companion, the true sharer of your life ? Did you ever return the love, the worship which she gave you ? Did you ever pity her jealous nature ; did you ever interpret it by any love or sensitiveness of your own, and abstain from wounding it ? Did you know, did you care, whether she suffered when you shut yourself up in your devotion to a pursuit in which she had no share ? All women have to bear that, no doubt, and are fools if they quarrel with the bread-winner's devotion to his work. Yes ; but all women have not her silent, brooding, jealous, sullen nature ; all women are not so little frivolous as she was ; all women, Dr. Wilmot, do not love their husbands as Mabel loved you."

She paused in the torrent of her words, and then he spoke.

"All this is new and terrible to me ; as new as it is terrible. Mrs. Prendergast, do me the justice to believe that."

"It is not for me to do you justice or injustice," she made answer ; "your punishment must come from your own heart, or you must go unpunished."

"But"—he almost pleaded with her—"Mabel never blamed me, never tried to keep me more with her ; rarely indeed expressed a wish of any kind. I declare, before God, I never dreamed, it never occurred to me to suspect that she was unhappy."

"No," she said ; "and Mabel knew that. She interested you so little, you cared so little for her, that you never looked below the surface of her life ; and her pride kept that surface fair and smooth. She would have died before she would have complained,—she has died, in fact, and made no sign."

"Yes," said Wilmot suddenly and bitterly ;

“but she has left me this legacy, brought me by your hands, of miserable regret and vain repentance. She has insured the destruction of my peace of mind ; she has taken care that mine shall be no ordinary grief, sent by God and to be dispelled by time ; she has added bitterness to the bitter, and put me utterly in the wrong by her unwarrantable concealment and reticence.”

“How truly manlike your feelings are, Dr. Wilmot ! She has hurt your pride, and you can’t forgive her even in death ! She has put *you* in the wrong,—and all her own wrongs, so silently borne, sink into nothing in comparison !”

“I deny it !” Wilmot said vehemently ; “she *had* no wrongs,—no woman of her acquaintance had a better husband. What did I ever deny her ?”

“Only your love, only a wife’s true place in your life, only all she longed for, only all she died for lack of.”

“All this is absurd,” he said. “If she really had these romantic notions, why did she conceal them ? Have *I* nothing to complain of in this ? Was she just to me, or candid with me ?”

“What encouragement did you give her? Do you think a proud, shy, silent woman like Mabel was likely to lay her heart open to so cold and careless a glance as yours? No; she loved you as few women can love; but if she had much love, so she had much pride and jealousy; and all three had power with her.”

“Jealousy!” said Wilmot in an angry tone; “in God’s name, of whom did she contrive to be jealous.”

“Her jealousy was not of a mean kind,” said Henrietta. “Ever since your marriage it had nourished itself, so far as I understood the matter, upon your devotion to your profession, upon the complacent ease with which you set *her* claims aside for those which so thoroughly engrossed you, that you had no heart, no eyes, no attention for her. Of late—” she paused.

“Well?” said Wilmot;—“of late?”

“Of late,” repeated Henrietta, speaking now with some more reserve of manner, “she believed you devoted—to a degree which conquered your devotion to your profession and to the interests of

your own advancement—to the patient who detained you at Kilsyth.”

“What madness! what utter folly!” said Wilmot; but his face turned deeply red, and he felt in his heart that the arrow had struck home.

“Perhaps so,” said Henrietta, and her voice resumed the cutting tone from which all through this painful interview Wilmot had shrunk. “But Mabel was not more reasonable or less so than other jealous women. You had never neglected your business for *her*, remember, or been turned aside by any sentimental attraction from your course of professional duty. Friendship, gratitude, and interest alike required you to attend to Mr. Foljambe’s summons. You did not come, and people talked. Mr. Foljambe himself spoke of the attractions of Kilsyth, and joked, after his inconsiderate manner.”

“In *her* presence?” said Wilmot incautiously.

“Yes, in *her* presence,” said Henrietta, who perfectly appreciated the slip he had made. “She knew some people who knew the Kilsyths, and she heard the remarks that were made. I daresay

she imagined more than she heard. No matter. Nothing matters any more. She was not sorry to die when her time came; she would not have you troubled,—that is all. And now I will leave you. I am going to her.”

The last sentence had a dreadful effect on Wilmot. In the agitation, the surprise, the pain of this interview, he had almost forgotten time; the present reality had nearly escaped him. He had been rapt away into a world of feeling, of passion; he had been absorbed in the sense of a discovery, and of something which seemed like an impossible injustice. With Henrietta's words it all vanished, and he remembered, with a start, that his wife lay dead upstairs. They were not talking of a life long extinguished, which in former years might have been made happier by him, but of one which had ended only a few hours ago; a life whose forsaken tenement was still untouched by “decay's effacing fingers.” With all this new knowledge fresh upon him, with all this bewildering conviction of irreparable wrong, he might look upon the calm young face again. Not

as he had looked upon it yesterday ; not with the deep sorrow and the irresistible though unjustified compassion with which death in youth is always regarded, but with an exceeding and heart-rending bitterness, in comparison with which even that repentant grief was mild and merciful. The fixedness, the blank, the silence, would be far more dreadful, far more reproachful now, when he knew that he had never understood, never appreciated her—had unwittingly tortured her ; now when he knew that, in all her youth and beauty, she had been glad to die. Glad to die ! The words had a tremendous, an unbearable meaning for him. If even the last month could have been un-lived ! If only he had not had *that* to reproach himself with, to justify *her* ! In vain, in vain. In that one moment of unspeakable suffering Wilmot felt that his punishment, however grave his offence, was greater than he could bear.

He turned away from Henrietta with the air of a man to whom another word would be intolerable, and sat down wearily. She stood still, looking at him, as if awaiting an answer or a dismissal.

At length she said, "Have you forgotten, Dr. Wilmot, that I asked your permission to carry out Mabel's wish?"

"No," he said drearily, "I remember. Of course do as you like; I should say, as she directed. I suppose the object of her request was, that I should see her no more, in death either. Well, well—it is fortunate that did not succeed too." He spoke in a patient, broken tone, which touched Henrietta's heart. But her perverted notion of truth and loyalty to the dead held her back from showing any sign of softening. Just as she was leaving the room he said:

"Such a course is very unusual, is it not?"

"I believe so," she replied; "but the servants know it was her desire."

Then Henrietta Prendergast went away; and presently he heard a slight sound in that awful room overhead, and he knew she had taken her place beside the dead. He felt, as he sat for hours of that day quite alone, like a banished man. His wife was doubly dead to him now. All his married life had grown on a sudden

unreal; and when he thought of the still white face which he was to see once, and only once more, for ever, it was with a strange sense of dread and avoidance, and not with the tender sorrow which, even amid the shock and self-reproach of yesterday, had come to his relief.

Somehow, he could not have told how, with the inevitable interruptions, the wretched necessary business of such a time, the hours of that day passed over Chudleigh Wilmot's head, and the night came. He had looked his last upon his wife, had taken his solemn leave of the death-chamber. She lay now in her coffin, sealed, hidden from sight for evermore, and there was nothing now but the long dreary waiting. In its turn that too passed, and in due time the funeral day; and Chudleigh Wilmot was quite alone in his silent house, and had only to look back into the past. Forward into the future he did not dare, he had not heart to look. A kind of blank, the reaction from intense excitement, had set in with him, and for the first time in his life his physical strength flagged. The claims of his business began to press

upon him ; people sent for him, respectfully and hesitatingly, but with some confidence that he would come, nevertheless. And Wilmot went ; and was received with condoling looks, which he affected not to see, and compassionating tones, of which he took no notice.

He had no more to do with the past—he had buried it; his sole desire was that others should aid him in this apparent oblivion ; how far from real it was, he alone could have told. He had written to Kilsyth a few indispensable lines, and had had a formal report of Madeleine's health, which he had conscientiously tried to range with other professional documents, and lay by with them. It was certainly a dark and dreary time, endless in length, and so hopeless, so final, that it seemed to have no outlet ; a time than which Chudleigh Wilmot believed life could never bring him a darker. But trouble was new to him. He learned more about it later on in his day.

When a fortnight had elapsed after Wilmot's return to London, and the tumult of his mind had subsided, though the bitterness of his feelings was

not yet allayed, he chanced one morning to require a paper, which he knew was to be found in a certain cabinet which filled a niche in the wall of his consulting-room. The cabinet in question was one he rarely opened; and the moment he attempted to turn the key, he felt confident that the lock had been tampered with. The conviction was singularly unpleasant; for the cabinet was a repository of private papers, deeds, letters, and professional notes. It also contained several poisons, which Wilmot kept there in what he supposed to be inviolable security. Closer inspection confirmed his suspicions. The lock had been opened by the simple process of breaking it; and the doors, merely laid together, had caught on a jagged piece of metal, and thus presented the slight obstacle they had offered. With a mere shake they unclosed.

This circumstance puzzled Wilmot exceedingly. He made a careful examination of the contents of the cabinet. All was precisely as he had left it; not a paper missing or disturbed.

“Who can have been at the cabinet?” he

thought, "and with what motive? Nothing has been taken; nothing, so far as I can discover, has been touched. Mere curiosity would hardly tempt anyone to run such a risk; and no one knew that there was anything of value here. Stay," he reflected; "one person knew it. *She* knew it; she knew that I kept private papers here. No doubt it was she who opened the cabinet. But with what motive? What can she possibly have wanted which she could have hoped to find here?"

No answer to this query presented itself to Wilmot's mind. He thought and thought over it, painfully recurring to all Mrs. Prendergast had told him, and trying to help himself to a solution of this mystery by the aid of those which had preceded it. For some time he thought in vain; at length the idea struck him that the jealous woman, restless and miserable in her unhappy curiosity—he could understand *now* what she had felt, he could pity her *now*—had opened the cabinet to seek for letters from some fancied rival in his affections. Nothing but his belief in the perversion of mind which comes of the indulgence of such a

passion as jealousy could have led Wilmot to suspect his wife of such an act for a moment. But he was a wise man, now that it was too late, in that lore which he had never studied while he might have read the book, and he recognised the transforming power of jealousy. Yes, that was it doubtless; she had sought here for the material wherewith to feed the flame that had tortured her.

Chudleigh Wilmot took the paper he wanted from the place where it had lain, and was about to close the doors of the cabinet once more—restoring them, until he could have the lock repaired, to their deceptive appearance of security—when his attention was caught by a dark-coloured spot, about the size of a shilling, upon the topmost sheet of a packet of papers which lay beside a small mahogany case containing the before-mentioned poisons. He took the packet out and examined it. The spot was there, and extended to every paper in the packet. A sudden flush and expression of vague alarm crossed Wilmot's face. He took up the case and examined the exterior. A dark mark, the stain of some glutinous fluid, ran down the side of

the box next which the papers had lain. For a moment he held the case in his hands, and literally dared not open it. Then in sickening fear he did so, and found its contents apparently undisturbed. The box was divided into ten little compartments, in each of which stood a tiny bottle, glass-stoppered and covered with a leaden capsule. To the neck of each was appended a little leaden seal, the mark of the French chemist from whom Wilmot had purchased the deadly drugs. He took the bottles out one by one, examined their seals, and held them up to the light. All safe for nine out of the number; but as he touched the tenth, the capsule with the leaden seal attached to it fell off, and Wilmot discovered, with ineffable horror, that the bottle, which had contained one of the deadliest poisons known to science, was half empty.

He set down the case, and reeled against the corner of the mantelshelf near him, like a drunken man. He could not face the idea that had taken possession of him; he could not collect his thoughts. He gasped as though water were surging round him. Once more he took up the bottle and looked

at it. It was only too true ; one half the contents was missing. He closed the case, and pushed it back into its place. It struck against something on the shelf of the cabinet. He felt for the object, and drew out *his wife's seal-ring* !

And now Chudleigh Wilmot knew what was the terror that had seized him. It was no longer vague ; it stood before him clear, defined, unconquerable ; and he groaned :

“ My God ! she destroyed herself ! ”

END OF VOL. I.

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